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STUART GORDON'S

Space Truckers

DAVID CRONENBERG
ON "CRASH"

DAVID LYNCH ON
"LOST HIGHWAY"

ANACONDA

MEN IN BLACK

1996: THE GENRE
YEAR IN REVIEW



HORROR & SCI-FI OSCAR PICKS

D. V. King

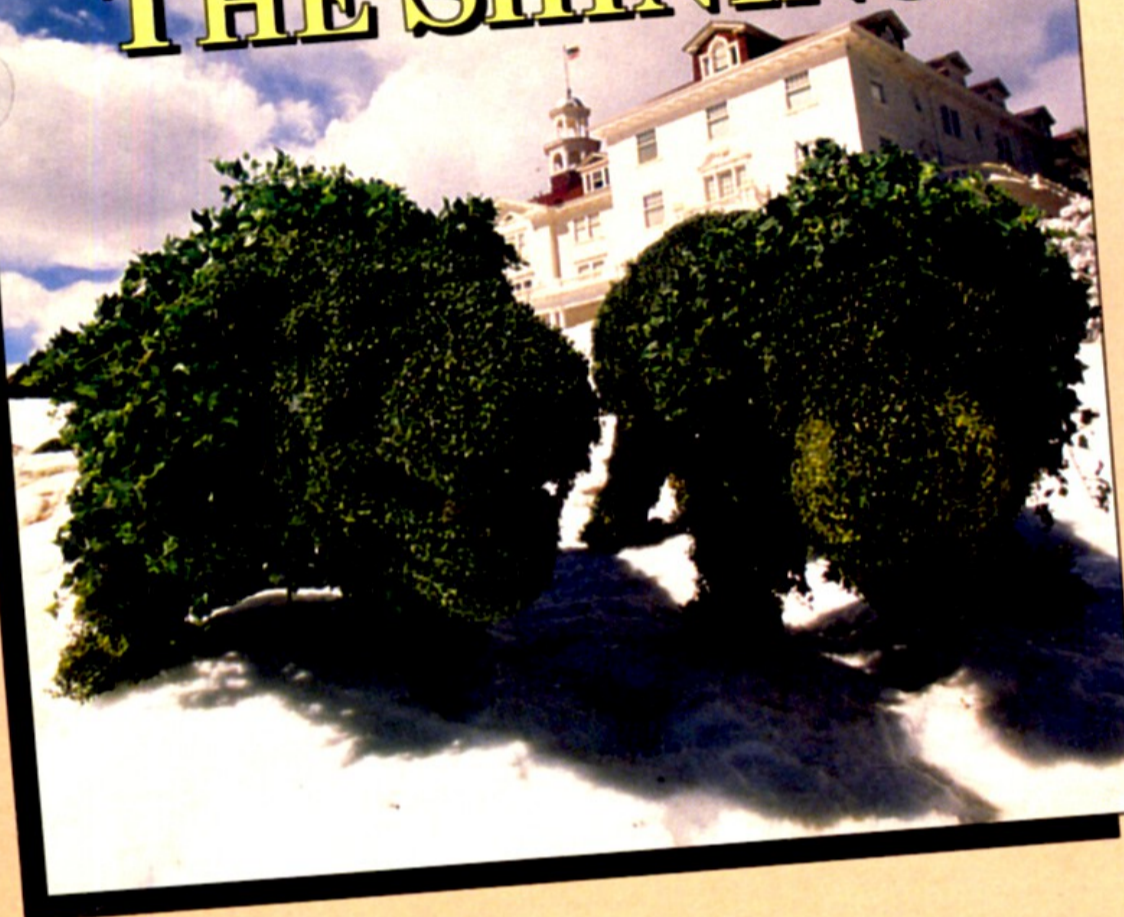
Volume 28 Number 10



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CINEFANTASTIQUE

Stephen King's THE SHINING



THE REVIEW OF HORROR, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

CINEFANTASTIQUE is published each and every month, with issues jam-packed with the latest stories on the hottest films you want to see.

Don't miss our next issue on the making of Stephen King's ABC mini-series THE SHINING, a preview of the six-hour television event to air in May. Director Mick Garris, who filmed King's acclaimed mini-series of THE STAND goes behind-the-scenes to discuss the challenge of bringing King's horror imagery to TV. Also, makeup supervisor Steve Johnson on designing King's rotting "woman in the room" and rampaging hedge animals, and Melvin Van Peebles on playing King's telepathic cook. Plus a retrospect look at Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film version starring Jack Nicholson and an interview with King himself!

Plus, in the same issue, the making of MTV's animated sensation AEON FLUX, including an episode guide to all seasons and an interview with cartoon visionary Peter Chung, and previews of Walt Disney's animated HERCULES and THE FIFTH ELEMENT, a mind-bending science fiction film from Luc Besson, director of LE FEMME NIKITA, and much more!

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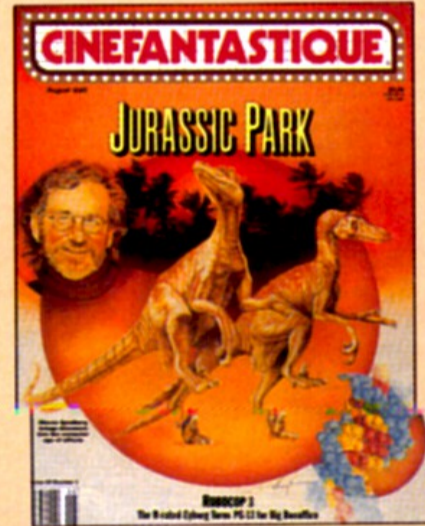
Volume 26 Number 6 Volume 27 Number 1

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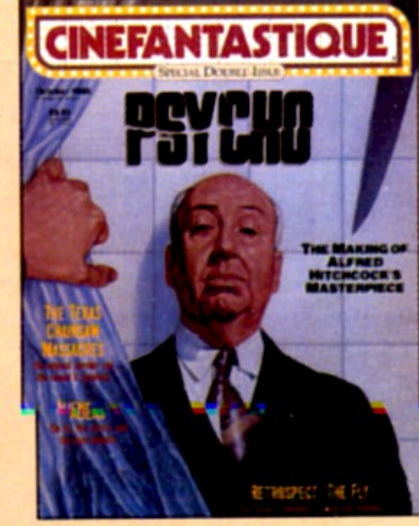
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This double issue features a retrospect on the making of Alfred Hitchcock's PSYCHO and settles who directed the infamous shower scene. **\$13.00**

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CONTENTS

VOLUME 28 NUMBER 10

"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

APRIL 1997

Oscar season is once again upon us, providing an opportunity to look back and assess the merits and demerits of last year's films. At *Cinefantastique*, of course, we take this opportunity to focus attention on the fine science-fiction, fantasy, and horror films that are often overlooked when it comes time to hand out Academy Awards in March. That trend has changed somewhat (as you will find in Mike Lyons' "Going for the Gold" article): many genre films do win Oscars these days, but they are usually in technical categories, while the so-called "major" awards (for acting, writing, and directing) are—with rare exceptions, like *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*—still reserved for mainstream films.

This is a shame, because genre films rank with the best cinematic offerings today. Although 1996 lacked the level of sophistication achieved in 1995, there were numerous exciting entries on view: *TWISTER*, *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, and *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE* were summer films that really *delivered*. They all received various critical brick-brats, but compare them to the films that earned critical kudos—e.g., *EVITA*—and you realize the genre is much better than it's given credit for.

All that was missing were some great intellectual offerings to balance the bombast. (There were some of these, too, but you had to track them down at the art house level.) 1996 should have been a great year for *cinefantastique*. However, two of the most unique and imaginative genre films slated for release were delayed until 1997. Both of these receive major coverage this issue: David Cronenberg's *CRASH* and David Lynch's *LOST HIGHWAY*. Both Cronenberg and Lynch have had their brush with high-profile studio filmmaking; it's unfortunate that the commercial prospects of their current, independent work require juggling release dates out of the way of bigger films. But whatever their distribution travails, the quality of both films is reassuring, proving that two of cinema's greatest visionaries still have something new to show us.

Steve Biodrowski



Page 8



Page 10



Page 14



Page 26



Page 32

4 RELEASE SCHEDULE: THIS MONTH'S GENRE FILMS

5 HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC: NEWS AND NOTES

Jodie Foster makes first *CONTACT* in the new film directed by Robert Zemeckis; Paul Verhoeven portrays Robert Heinlein's "fascistic" future in *STARSHIP TROOPERS*.

7 "THE HUNGER"

If you have an appetite for horror, then check out the pilot episode of the new Showtime adult fantasy series from Ridley and Tony Scott. / *Preview by Alan Jones*

8 "ANACONDA"

Jon Voight (*DELIVERANCE*) negotiates another river wild, this time pursued by lethal constrictors of mythic magnitude. *Article by Douglas Eby*

10 ILLEGAL ALIENS: "MEN IN BLACK"

Border patrol was never like this—Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith track E.T.s of a different kind. / *Preview by Judd Hollander*

12 VISIT TO A "DARK PLANET"

The producers of *PROJECT: SHADOWCHASERS* try to launch a low-budget feature franchise, starring Michael York. *On-set report by Chuck Wagner*

14 THE MAKING OF "SPACE TRUCKERS"

REANIMATOR's Stuart Gordon directs his biggest film yet—an action-packed science-fiction adventure set in a realistic-looking, working-class future. / *Articles by Dennis Fischer and Alan Jones*

26 DAVID CRONENBERG GOES "CRASH"

An in-depth discussion with the cerebral auteur on his adaptation of J.G. Ballard's cult classic. / *Interview by Paul Wardle*

32 DAVID LYNCH NAVIGATES THE "LOST HIGHWAY"

The story behind the making of the director's latest outré opus; plus, a profile of the film's "Mystery Man," actor Robert Blake. *Articles by Frederick C. Szebin & Steve Biodrowski*

42 GOING FOR THE GOLD: GENRE OSCAR WINNERS

Once all but shut out from consideration, science-fiction, fantasy, and horror films begin to make in-roads to the major awards; also we give our picks for Oscar consideration. *Retrospective by Mike Lyons*

46 THE BEST OF 1996: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

With Oscar season turning our thoughts to the best of last year, we take the opportunity to offer our Top Ten picks—in feature films, soundtracks, laser discs, and direct-to-video.

54 REVIEWS

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EAGERLY AWAITED

THE LOST WORLD (Universal)

"What I wish to propose is that complex animals become extinct not because of a change in their physical adaptation to their environment, but because of their behavior. I would suggest that the latest thinking in chaos theory, or nonlinear dynamics, provides tantalizing hints to how this happens. It suggests to us that behavior of complex animals can change very rapidly, and not always for the better. It suggests that behavior can cease to be responsive to the environment, and lead to decline and death. It suggests that animals may stop adapting. Is this what happened to the dinosaurs? Is this the true cause of their disappearance? We may never know...."

So speaks Dr. Ian Malcolm in the beginning of Michael Crichton's *The Lost World*, his sequel to *Jurassic Park*. The doctor gets a chance to test his theory when a rich paleontologist proposes funding an expedition to track down reports of surviving dinosaurs in a "Lost World." Malcolm knows that the sightings result from the genetically-engineered reptiles at Jurassic Park on Isla Nublar. When the sightings continue, however, a year after the destruction of the park, Malcolm joins the expedition, hoping that this Lost World, discovered on Isla Sorna, will provide a sort of natural laboratory to solve the riddle of extinction. But there's another riddle: What is the connection between Isla Sorna and Jurassic Park?

The book, which was adapted for the screen by David Koepp, is an entertaining sequel that forges a strong link without slavishly copying the original. Some of the elements are certainly familiar, but playing with the mystery of the relationship between Isla Sorna and Isla Nublar keeps things interesting instead of predictable. And by focusing on the question of extinction, Crichton finds interesting new thematic material to mine, just as he used chaos theory and genetics to provide a subtext for *Jurassic Park*. Instead of just rehashing a bunch of set-piece sequences that would make a big summer movie, Crichton created a novel that very nearly stands on its own. With this kind of a solid basis, Stephen Spielberg's highly anticipated summer event movie, with Jeff Goldblum reprising the role of Malcolm, could surpass the original. Let's just hope they do justice to the source. Julianne Moore, Richard Schiff, and Vince Vaughn co-star.

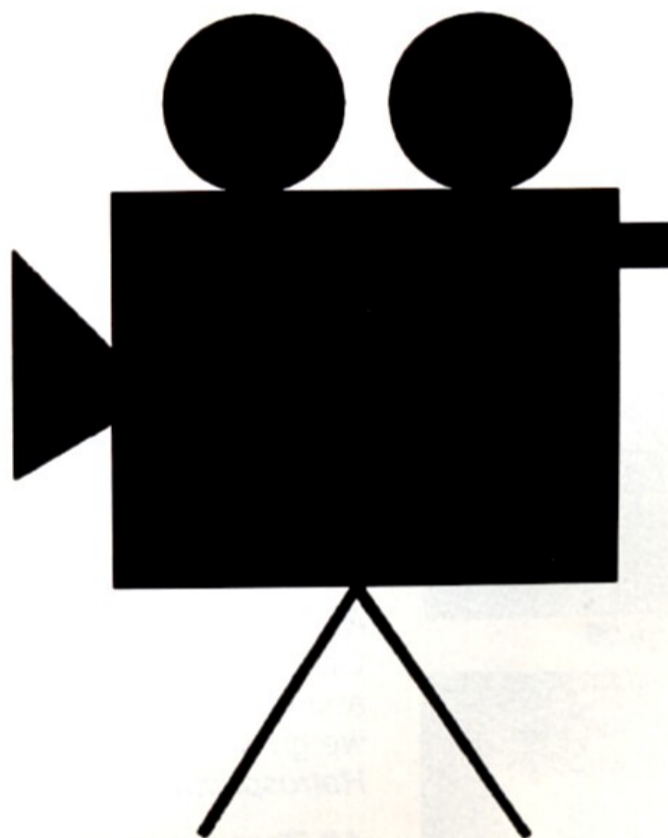
Memorial Day



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



ANIMATION CELEBRATION March 24

The World Animation Celebration runs March 24-30 at Los Angeles' Pasadena Civic Center. Events include a celebration of Japanese anime, a tribute to the "Outlaws of Animation" like Mike Judge and John Kricfalusi. For details call 818-991-2884, fax 818-991-3773 or e-mail at animag@aol.com or click into <http://www.animag.com>

CATS DON'T DANCE (Warners) March 28

Turner Feature Animation's first release is a tribute to the golden era of movie musicals. A joint venture with David Kirschner productions (*THE PAGE MASTER*), the film has some top vocal talent (Scott Bakula, Natalie Cole, Kathy Najimy) and a musical score by Randy Newman (*JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*). SEE CFQ 27:6.

CRASH (Fine Line) March 21

David Cronenberg's opus reaches U.S. screens five months late. A 1996 release was scrapped after Ted Turner (who owned Fine Line's parent company New Line) attacked the film. The controversy may be a publicity bonanza but Cronenberg fears the March release may hurt the film. "I have no quarrel with New Line or Fine Line," he claimed. "They were prevented from releasing the film by Turner. It was originally supposed to be released Oct. 4th, as it was in Canada, and when it was delayed, I was very upset. I agreed that November and December were not good months, so we moved it to 1997, but there's no way I can compare [what it will do in the U.S.] except by what it did in Canada and we were the number one film in Canada." SEE PAGE 26. Paul Wardle



KISSED (Orion)

April 11

This amazing debut from Canadian director Lynne Stopkewich portrays an unusual young woman (Molly Parker) who achieves spiritual bliss by communing with the dead, in a carnal way. Don't let the necrophile subject matter scare you away from this brave, fascinating effort. SEE PAGE 5.

LIAR LIAR (Universal)

March 24

Jim Carrey reteams with ACE VENTURA director Tom Shadyac (*THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*). Carrey plays Fletcher Reid, a fast talking attorney and habitual liar. When his son Max (Justin Cooper) blows out the candles on his birthday cake, he has just one wish—that his dad would stop lying for 24 hours. When the wish miraculously comes true, Fletcher's big mouth suddenly becomes a big liability, and comedy ensues. Swoosie Kurtz, Jennifer Tilly, Cary Elwes, and Amanda Donohoe co-star.

LOST HIGHWAY (October) Now playing

David Lynch's new film hit the road on February 28. Don't miss it. SEE PAGE 32.

RETURN OF THE JEDI (Fox) March 7

Did anybody really want this to return? SEE CFQ 28:8.

TURBO: A POWER RANGERS ADVENTURE (Fox) March 21

The first film did well, though not as well as *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES*. Let's face it: part of whatever limited charm the series had was its rubber-suited monsters battling colorfully clad heroes. The switch to CGI effects may have made the feature look more polished on the big screen, but it destroyed much of the campy fun. It's a shame that this particular franchise, which began as a Japanese TV show, should get a second shot at a national theatrical release while the current *GAMERA* and *GODZILLA* efforts are available only on import video.

THE WARRIOR OF WAVERLY STREET (Trimark) April 11

Manny Coto (*DR. GIGGLES*) wrote and directed this family fantasy, in which a young man discovers a suit which empowers him to fight off an alien invasion. A previously announced summer release was scrapped—but instead of rescheduling for the Fall, Trimark pushed the film all the way back to April. The official explanation: the price of commercial air time doubled during the presidential election, and the independent company's publicity budget could not afford the extra charge. Let's hope they put those advertising dollars to good use now that Bill Clinton's back in the white house, not interfering with their distribution plans. Joseph Mazello (*JURASSIC PARK*) stars. SEE CFQ 28:7.

NON-APOCALYPSE NOW

THE FIFTH ELEMENT (Columbia)

Bruce Willis (*TWELVE MONKEYS*) toplines a cast that includes Gary Oldman (*BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*) and Ian Holm (*ALIENS*) in this science-fiction fantasy. The press notes promise an "amazing glimpse into a weirdly exotic, non-apocalyptic future" that tells a "timeless story about love and survival, heroes and villains" in which "a New York City cab driver...becomes an unlikely hero when he is swept up in a battle between good and the ultimate evil." The script was written by director Luc Besson with Robert Mark Kamen, from a story by Besson. Besson gained a high-profile in this country for directing the unbelievably over-rated import *LE FEMME NIKITA*, then graduated to a reasonably entertaining American debut, *THE PROFESSIONAL*.

May 9

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

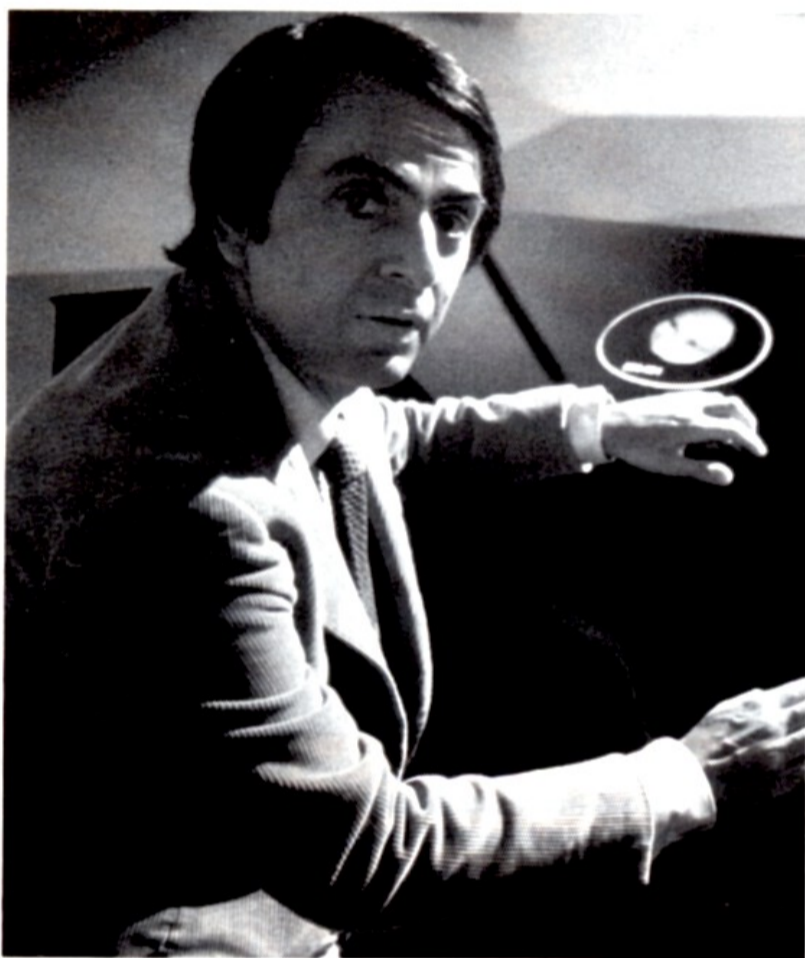
CONTACT

Robert Zemeckis directs Jodie Foster in a search for E.T. intelligence.

by Douglas Eby

Under the direction of Robert Zemeckis (*BACK TO THE FUTURE*) and with a cast including Jodie Foster, Matthew McConaughey, John Hurt, James Woods, Tom Skerritt, David Morse, Rob Lowe, and Angela Bassett, *CONTACT* will be the screen version of Carl Sagan's novel, set in 1999, about a SETI radio telescope communication from an alien civilization. Sagan died at the end of December from pneumonia related to a rare disease called myelodysplasia. The director of Planetary Studies at Cornell University and a consultant to NASA, he was a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and had developed and hosted the award-winning PBS series *COSMOS*. He was working on *CONTACT* as co-producer.

One of the central sets is a spherical pod surrounded by a dodecahedron-shaped superstructure. The pod is a vehicle whose design is from alien technology, based on the radio telescope communication from the star Vega. Producer Steve Starkey (*DEATH BECOMES HER*) explained, "When this message comes, it eventually gets deciphered by Ellie [Jodie Foster] and some experts. It turns out to be instructions to build a machine. Nobody knows what it is, and the materials, although made from things on Earth, have never been used before. So it's alien technology with human construction. Theoretically, the machine transports you somewhere, and no one knows how it's going to work. That's what she finds out." Radio astronomer Ellie (Foster), leading the investigation of the coded signal, finds an ally in Palmer Joss (McConaughey), a spiritual scholar and high level



The novel by the late Carl Sagan, creator and host of the PBS series *COSMOS*, served as the basis for the film.

government advisor, and her journey in the alien-designed machine reportedly has a profound metaphysical dimension.

Based on SETI radio astronomy, the alien radio message gets translated into a visual form—what Starkey refers to as hieroglyphics: "They're presented on a video

screen, which is the way they display sound now when they're reading maps of the universe. By showing negative space and positive space at different distances of what the sound is bouncing off of, that creates a colored pattern that scientists can then interpret. In this case, the hieroglyphics are alien, so they get all the decryption experts together, and eventually decipher it as instructions."

Starkey credits the advanced techno look of the set to production designers Ed Verrezux (*BACK TO THE FUTURE II and III*) and Rick Carter (*JURASSIC PARK*), visual effects supervisor Ken Ralston (*FORREST GUMP*) along with director Zemeckis and others: "It was a team of people who came up with ideas, but a lot of what you see is described in the novel; the dodecahedron is in fact in the novel; it's just the whole machine that supports it is new, and how you actually get inside the pod, and the action is different than what's in the novel." □

Short Notes

Coming off the opening weekend success of *THE RELIC*, producer **Gale Anne Hurd** already has another genre project in development. MGM has acquired the science-fiction script *SUBMERGED*, by Todd Slavkin and Darren Swimmer, for her. The story is set 20 years in the future, after an earthquake has submerged Los Angeles. ♣ Speaking of *THE RELIC*, that film's director, **Peter Hyams**, is scripting a film about a meteor on a collision course with Earth. This premise seems to be the next hot item after volcanoes. Hyams flick is the third such script in development. ♣ Actor-turned-writer-director **Peter Capaldi**, who nabbed an Oscar for his brilliant short *FRANZ KAFKA'S IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*, has signed to helm his first feature, *THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES*, for Columbia Pictures. The script will be based on a story by Edmond Hamilton that was first published in 1946, about a newspaperman who develops X-ray vision. The film will have little to do with Roger Corman's 1963 film of the same name. ♣ Producer **Chris Carter** (*THE X-FILES*, *MILLENNIUM*) has announced that he will quit the Fox TV shows, after the 1997-98 season, to concentrate on films. □

LOVING THE DEAD

by Steve Biodrowski

KISSED, scheduled by Orion for release April 11, is the surprisingly entertaining story of a young woman with a rather unusual predilection: she achieves a sort of transcendental—one might even say metaphysical—satisfaction from sexual coupling with male cadavers. As bizarre as this sounds, the film takes a decidedly non-exploitation approach to the material that wins over viewers not scared-off by the subject matter in the first place.

Of the choice of subject matter, first time director, Lynne Stopkewich said, "The story came to me in a fortuitous way. I was writing an original screenplay, and I was doing research into women's erotica. I came across this anthology, with a short story called 'We So Seldom Look on Love,' by a Canadian author, Barbara Gowdy, on which *KISSED* was eventually based. The story kind of freaked me out, because necrophilia was not on the forefront of my mind at the time; in fact, I'd never even considered the concept. It shocked me, and at the same time I liked the character a lot. I shut the book and continued to write this completely different screenplay, but then the story and, more so, the character haunted me; I couldn't get her out of my mind. I started thinking, 'If this is how the short story is working on me, imagine if it was made into a film!' I really thought the material was interesting because of the way it handled the subject matter. It had a really ironic, humorous tone, but at the same time it didn't try to pass any moral judgement on the character, which was interesting and quite brave. At the center of the whole thing was the character: the short story is written in the first person as an internal monologue, so you really get inside her head. She is, in my mind, a sort of sexual maverick. And I've always been terrified of death, so I thought, 'Here's a chance to really push the envelope! Not only am I going to have to do a bunch of research into the funeral industry and embalming, but this woman literally makes love to dead guys.' I thought I could create a film that—regardless of whether it worked or didn't—somehow, somewhere, there would be some people out there interested to see it." □

STARSHIP TROOPERS

Paul Verhoeven comes to grips with Robert Heinlein's vision of the future.

by Dan Persons

Director Paul Verhoeven (ROBOCOP, TOTAL RECALL) returns to the science fiction genre with an \$80 million adaptation of Robert Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS, which TriStar pictures is positioning as a summer event flick. Starring Dina Meyer (DRAGONHEART), Jake Busey (THE FRIGHTENERS), and Michael Ironside (TOTAL RECALL), the film is a reunion with many of his ROBOCOP cronies, including producer Jon Davison, screenwriter Ed Neumeier, and stop-motion/CGI specialist Phil Tippett.

If the determinedly ambivalent director seems an odd choice for Heinlein's resolutely Libertarian vision of the future (Women in the military? Okay! Government-sanctioned, disciplinary floggings? Okay, too!), Verhoeven claimed he had a handle on it: "The book was attacked when it came out for its kind of fascistic attitude. We didn't go away from that; basically, we created a society which has this kind of Heinleinian set-up, and we're not saying to the audience that it's wrong. There's a certain ambiguity in seeing this society. The people inside this society are not fascistic, but the society itself is, so you have to make up your mind if a society can be fascistic while its citizens are people that you like. The ambiguity is on another level than it was with BASIC INSTINCT or TOTAL RECALL. Basically, it's a society that's really cleaned up, like everybody would like it to be if you listened to the



"The book was attacked its fascistic attitude," said Verhoeven. "We did not go away from that. The people in this society are not fascistic, but the society is." Verhoeven directs Casper Van Dien (center) and Michael Ironside on the set.

politicians. It's that type of society, where criminality is reigned in, where there's no drugs, where people in high school are back in uniform, where everybody thinks that mathematics are important to achieve something in life.

"There's this kind of news report in the movie—like the news in ROBOCOP—but at the end of

every item it asks, 'Would you like to know more?' There's a voice that says that, and you can either look at the next item, or you can go on looking at the movie again. But the question, 'Would you like to know more?' is also, 'Do you accept this? Do you want this? Do you accept this society; do you want this society?'" □

Mortal Kombat II

by Alan Jones

Because the movie version of MORTAL KOMBAT was such a huge box office hit, taking \$23.3 million in its first weekend (the second highest August opening in US film history), it was only a matter of time before a sequel based on the phenomenally successful video game was put in front of the cameras. MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION is that \$30 million continuation, shot on location around the world in 85 days in Thailand, Jordan, Israel and North Wales, and based at London's gigantic Leavesden Studios, home to the new STAR WARS trilogy. Like MORTAL KOMBAT, ANNIHILATION is produced by Larry Kasanoff, formerly the President and co-founder of James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment, who said, "MK:A is not a sequel. It's another chapter in an enormous myth that has captured the public's interest. Once we were certain there would be a second movie—roughly a month after the first was released—we had to make a choice. Should we make the same movie over again with the same story? Sure, it would open and do some business, so why not? Or should we take the far riskier route and try and make it better? We made a rule three months after MORTAL KOMBAT opened. No one was to congratulate themselves for its success. We could only talk about what we could improve. Anything that was less than excellent was gotten rid of. If we loved the writers, stories, locations or people, they were back. If not....." □

Obituaries

by Jay Stevenson

Jordan Cronenweth

The cinematographer of BLADE RUNNER (1982) and ALTERED STATES (1980) died in Los Angeles on November 29 of Parkinson's Disease. He was 61.

Born in 1935, Jordan Cronenweth, a respected director of photography in the '70s, was diagnosed with the disease in 1978, but he went on to do some of his best work in the '80s, including the two visually arresting science-fiction efforts mentioned above. In particular, BLADE RUNNER was an influential film, establishing a new look for futuristic science-fiction. Cronenweth earned a British Academy Award for his work on this film.

Jack Nance

The star of David Lynch's first feature film, ERASERHEAD, died in January. He had been hit on the head during a fight, and was found dead the next morning.

A cult figure because of his appearance in the Lynch film, he went on to star in several low-budget horror efforts, such as GHOULIES. He also became a sort of repertory member of the unofficial David Lynch stock company. He appeared in several other Lynch efforts, such as BLUE VELVET, WILD AT HEART, and the well regarded but short lived television series TWIN PEAKS. Fittingly, his last role was also in a film for the director that launched his career: Jack Nance had a small role in Lynch's LOST HIGHWAY, which opened in February. □

CFQ on Internet

Stop by the CFQ Website for our on-going celebration of all things sci-fi, horror and fantasy. We'll be adding new updates on a regular basis, so bookmark us and keep coming back!

<http://www.cfq.com>

Also, if you have suggestions, comments or questions, e-mail us—
mail@cfq.com

Production Starts

ANTS

Woody Allen lends his voice to this animated effort from Dreamworks.

CHUPACABRA: BLOOD HUNT!

The hottest urban legend in Mexico for the last couple years becomes the subject of a low-budget, no-name horror film. (The name translates as "goat-sucker"—a beast that has, in numerous allegedly true accounts, been attacking live-stock in various regions of Mexico.)

HELLBLOCK 13

Gunnar Hansen (Leatherface in the original TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE) stars in a low-budget horror effort filming in South Carolina, under the direction of Paul Talbot.

THE HUNGER

Ridley and Tony Scott explore adult, erotic horror on Showtime.

THE HUNGER, an adult-oriented horror anthology series developed by Ridley and Tony Scott in conjunction with writer Jeff Fazio, debuts on Showtime in March, with a 90-minute pilot consisting of three episodes: "Menage A Trois," directed by Jake Scott, Ridley's son; "The Swords," directed by Tony Scott; and "Necros," directed by Russell Mulcahy. Terence Stamp (SUPERMAN II) hosts the series, which takes its title from Tony Scott's 1980 feature debut.

"Menage" stars Karen Black (TRILOGY OF TERROR) as Miss Gati, a deformed, wheelchair-bound woman, who transfers her soul to the body of her young nurse Steph (Lena Heady) to seduce her attractive gardener Jerry (Daniel Craig). As their sexual trysts turn sinister and violent, Jerry realizes something is wrong as the more irritable and tired Steph becomes, the more content and relaxed Miss Gati ap-

Amanda Ryan and Balthazar Getty in "Swords," director Tony Scott's contribution to the three-part pilot. The series will consist of single episodes.



pears to be.

Jake Scott, who has directed music videos and commercials, admits he was hedging his bets with 'Menage A Trois.' He said, "It was my long-form debut. Of course, I'd take the easiest option as there was no point in making it harder for myself. Unlike my father, I'm not a special effects-oriented person, and I didn't want to get bogged down in anything too ambitious. It's straightforward atmosphere I'm going for; not shocks so much as psychological creepiness. The use of syringes to inject morphine into Miss Gati is the most visceral stuff I suppose, deliberately so, to make the audience uncomfortable. But I do feel my episode is more a psychological-based thriller than anything else."

Regarding his genre influences, Jake added, "ROSEMARY'S BABY, 2001, and THE HAUNTING are my type of personal favorites. I prefer subtlety over blood-letting and head-ripping. There's only one moment of violence in 'Menage A Trois,' and that's where Miss Gati possesses Steph for the final time and throws Jerry around the room with the strength of several men. I'm aiming for a James Bond feel in this sequence. You know, like the way Pussy Galore beat up Bond in GOLDFINGER. Or the way Daryl Hannah fought Harrison Ford in BLADERUNNER. Hmmm! I think I may steal from that...."

Karen Black (Oscar-nominated for FIVE EASY PIECES) was Scott's only choice to play Miss Gati. "All of Karen's performances have that something extra,"

**Preview by
Alan Jones**



Karen Black stars as the parasitic Mrs. Gati in "Menage A Trois," one of three half-hour episodes comprising the opening pilot of THE HUNGER.

he explained. "I was looking for an actress who wouldn't just do the Gloria Swanson-SUNSET BOULEVARD recluse bit. Karen exudes an eccentricity in her manner and even her eyes that was perfect for the part. She also has a sexual aura about her as I didn't want to make Miss Gati another hideous old hag. I wanted her to be an alive person whose disability is a rather sad fact of life. Sure, she's monstrous, but not physically—although there is a very eerie scene where we glimpse her deformed legs. I wanted audiences to have a startling experience meeting her for the first time, not a depressing one."

He continued, "Karen has brought something to the story that I hadn't initially planned for, either: black comedy, in both senses of the first word! There's a great deal of subtle humor in the script that Karen eases out and balances magnificently. For my first dabble into film drama, I couldn't have had a better, or more experienced lead actress."

Despite the hectic pace, Scott said he enjoyed it so much that he's decided to direct another episode later in the series, titled "Your Tiny Hand Is Frozen." He explained, "It's about a guy who falls in love with a telephone voice. It plays like a ghost story but just focuses on a man in a room becoming more and more obsessed by this woman's voice. His life literally stops for her calls and they eventually send him mad. It's very Edgar Allan Poe." □

ANACONDA

Jon Voight goes down the Amazon in search of a mythical serpent.

By Douglas Eby

ANACONDA—written by Hans Bauer, Jim Cash, Jack Epps Jr., and John M. Mandel—follows a documentary film crew searching for the legendary Shirishama Indians in the Amazon. The cast includes Ice Cube (BOYZ N THE HOOD), Kari Wuhrer (THINNER), and Jennifer Lopez (MONEY TRAIN)—who was nicknamed “Selenaconda” by the real film crew, in honor of her new role as the slain Latina singer. Another member of the expedition is played by Eric Stoltz (THE PROPHECY), who at one point is saved by adventurer Paul Sarone (Jon Voight, of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE), who goes on to commandeer their boat to go after the big snake. Luis Llosa (THE SPECIALIST) directed. Columbia plans an April 18 release date.

Seeing the title character in operation, it's easy to get a feel for one of the themes of the story: the threat of predatory beasts, in this case exotic ones—the largest killer snakes in the world. When it starts moving, the 25-foot mechanical snake used at one of the locations makes one forget it isn't organic.

Aboard a jungle boat, a film crew cruises the Amazon in search of a lost tribe; what they find is far deadlier.



Eric Stoltz (left) and Jon Voight (center) confer with director Luis Llosa on location for ANACONDA.

Two mechanical snakes were built, including a 40-foot one. Members of the crew have commented on how naturalistic was their movement, which was based on studying real snakes. Walt Conti—whose credits include SEAQUEST DSV, THE ABYSS and the rattlesnake effects in MAVERICK—noted: “We watched a lot of videos of snakes to get the moves. Even though there's this very large snake that's on the fringe of being believable—because it moves so snake-like, you buy it, instead of saying, ‘It's just some alien creation.’”

We've had to create and miniaturize very powerful joints, but it's not like creating a torso with arms—you basically have this very long chain of joints.”

In addition to the mechanicals, there were some real anacondas for some shots; plus, director Llosa noted, “For the main attack moments, we have computer graphic ones. The animatronic wouldn't be able to do the main lunging and coiling. The anaconda basically wraps around you, and you sort of rotate with the animal while it's squeezing. We don't have the final effect yet, but from what I've seen, they've done a good job in matching the computer graphics to Walt Conti's animatronics.”

Going after the snake is the true mission of Sarone, who deviously gains the documentary crew's trust, promising to help them locate the secretive Shirishama. Speaking on the set—a barge on the FANTASY ISLAND lagoon at the Los Angeles County Arboretum, Voight said the character he plays “is quite an amazing personality. I think the studio publicity release is a perfect description: ‘dangerous opportunist and man of the jungle’—that's exactly right. The dangerous aspect is really fun for me in this picture. There is indicated in the script some shamanic aspect to the snakes, yet it's all quite mysterious, because the character I play describes who the Shirishama are and what these snakes represent, and we can't take seriously anything he says—he's a dangerous character, and will lie quite easily. There is a bit of mystery about these snakes and their purpose. The guardians of the Shirishama are these huge snakes, and as we get closer to this tribe, we confront the mother of the guardians, this great snake—very dangerous. We seem to be going into terrain we shouldn't be going into, forced by this character who wills it to be. There's a part of the film where I take out a



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Left: Walt Conti's mechanical snake rears its head. Above: Terri Flores (Jennifer Lopez) struggles to pull Danny (Ice Cube) from the clutches of the lethal anaconda.

ways it's a little bit of a relief that we're on the last hours here of the shoot, because everyone has to be on their guard not to make silly mistakes and to anticipate anything that might go wrong."

The majority of the principal photography was done in Brazil, a new location for most of the crew, including Voight: "Everyone talked about the heat you were going to encounter, even though it was the rainy season, not the hot season. It was quite stifling. Although I'm not a fellow who wears shorts, I just didn't wear very many clothes, and walked around the hotel like a vagrant, in makeup half the time, with my [prosthetic] scar."

After doing yet another scene in which she has to react to the threatening snake

aboard the barge, Lopez, perhaps only half-jokingly, said with a laugh to her director, "Can't you use my scream from last week?" She admitted the repetition can get old: "There's so much reacting in this movie, that sometimes you just get tired of it. This is our last night of shooting, and it's been four months—a tough gig. We were in Brazil about seven weeks. The whole thing was such a huge experience; you pretty much just have to give over to it. I think it really served the movie well to be in that situation and to feel hopelessly trapped there—in the Amazon, in the middle of nowhere. It was pretty intense."

One of Llosa's chief concerns was being able to visually match the real jungle locations with the L.A. Arboretum set, but the director said, "Kurt Petrocelli, our production designer, did a very good job in terms of not seeing the difference. We jumped from the Amazon to the jungle we created in the Arboretum, and you still have the sense you're deep in the jungle. Also, the

idea was that as the film progresses, the jungle gets more claustrophobic, which lends a better sense of fear and terror to the characters. So it worked out well, and we did most of that more claustrophobic jungle here."

Jon Voight concluded, "This picture has been an adventure. I've had enough experience with films that I have a sense of what they'll turn out to be, and it seems to me this one is going to do all the things we had hoped initially it might do. Each character in the piece is well-delineated—someone you care about. The film's going to take people on a tremendous adventure, with lots of suspense, lots of danger, and then it's going to pay off very well—with all you might anticipate when you hear that there's going to be an exploration into the far reaches of the Amazon that confronts a 25-foot snake, then a 45-foot snake, at the waterfall of the Shirishama—that kind of magical thing." □

Jon Voight stars as Paul Sarone, a mysterious "man of the jungle"—with his own personal agenda—who leads a documentary film crew down the Amazon.



huge snake skin, and roll it out on the deck of this barge, and Ice Cube says, 'They have snakes this big?' and I say, 'Whatever shed this skin has grown. But something like this has made a meal of our dead partner.' And then Jennifer Lopez says, 'Snakes don't eat people.' And I say, 'They don't? Anacondas are a perfect killing machine; they strike, wrap around you, hold you tighter than your true love, and you get the privilege of hearing your bones break before the power of the embrace causes your veins to explode! Imagine capturing something like this alive! It's worth a lot of money!'"

Voight noted that this is the first time he's worked with an animatronic character: "They've done quite a brilliant job with this one. It has a strong personality. I just got whacked with it: I was doing a sequence where I was putting a hood around it to catch it, and as I was trying to move in, it moved and whacked me in the head. Now these things are very heavy pieces of machinery, and it's pretty dangerous. In some

M

Barry

By Judd Hollander

Earth it seems, has become a focal point for alien activity. Alien merchants, diplomats, and tourists frequently stop here and (disguised as humans) freely intermingle with the natives. As long as they keep the peace, there is no trouble, but when any of them step outside the law, the Men in Black step in. Oh yes, and they can't let the population at large know what's going on.

In **MEN IN BLACK**, the new film from director Barry Sonnenfeld, Will Smith plays Jay, a New York cop who stumbles upon a terrorist assassination plot. When the targets turn out to be two ambassadors from different worlds, he is recruited by Tommy Lee Jones as Kay, an agent of the Men in Black, to help prevent a interplanetary war. Also involved are actress Linda Fiorentino (**THE LAST SEDUCTION**); actor Vincent D'onofrio (**ED WOOD**); screenwriter Ed Solomon (**BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE**); production designer Bo Welch (**EDWARD SCISSOR-HANDS**); and special make-up effects artist Rick Baker (**ED WOOD**). The film is based on the Lowell Cunningham comic books of the same name. Columbia plans a July 1997 release.

The film came about thanks to the efforts of producers Walter F. Parks and Laurie MacDonald. In 1992, the two, who were attracted to the books' premise of aliens walking among us, optioned the rights to a graphic novel based on the series. (The comics themselves are reportedly based on an urban legend of aliens living on earth, being monitored by a mysterious government agency.) Speaking at a recent



MEN IN BLACK: Tommy Lee Jones is Agent Kay, who monitors the activity of illegal aliens—from outerspace, that is; Will Smith is Jay, a former New York City police officer recruited by Kay after stumbling upon an intergalactic conspiracy.



EN IN BLACK

Sonnenfeld's aliens have already invaded.

press conference, Parks recalled that he wanted the audience to see the world in a different way. "If you drive by an all-night laundromat at three a.m., look inside and see someone seemingly mesmerized by the clothes going round, you'll think 'What planet are they from?' This movie provides that answer."

MacDonald, pointed out MIB is a strange blend of comedy, drama, action, adventure "with a high sense of the absurd," and they both felt Barry Sonnenfeld was the perfect man to direct the film. Sonnenfeld, who first saw the script while he was trying to develop GET SHORTY, side-stepped the alien question. "I don't know if aliens exist or not, but I do know that if you sleep with your closet door closed and your head completely under the covers, they can't find you." He later admitted he hopes aliens do not exist ("they frighten me").

Like everyone else involved in MIB, what attracted him was the humor of the project. "I loved its sensibility...and I've always believed deeply in my heart that we, as humans, really don't have a clue about what's going on. I wanted to make a movie that, in a light and fun sort of way, shows us that perhaps we really are: clueless."

One of his major contributions was to take the script, which was originally set in Las Vegas, Washington, and Philadelphia, and switch the location to New York City because "aliens would be the most comfortable" in the Big Apple. "Then again" Sonnenfeld noted, "Maybe I just wanted to direct a movie [where I could] stay home." Sonnenfeld also felt that GET SHORTY proved to be the perfect training ground for MIB. "Is there a big difference



between a movie about Hollywood and a movie about aliens? I don't think so."

That type of offbeat humor quickly endeared Sonnenfeld to the cast. Tommy Lee Jones, who admitted he has "no recognizable sense of humor," noted he had a ball making the film, which was shot on location in New York and Los Angeles and on five soundstages at Sony Pictures during a 17-week period, beginning in mid-March of 1996. "It was like a kid going to summer camp," said Jones. "Barry and Will kept me in a world of humor. I was laughing all day long." Smith returned the praise, saying, "Tommy was one of the funniest people I ever met in my life. He did a great

job blending comedy and keeping it serious."

Linda Fiorentino plays Dr. Laurel Weaver, a medical examiner who finds certain dead bodies are not what they appear to be. Fiorentino, who apparently won the role in a poker game ("He had a full house to my four of a kind"), loved the idea of switching to comedy after a series of hard-boiled films. She wound up having fun working with the various puppets and alien creatures, although working with non-human characters does create problems. "I did have this one scene [in the morgue] that was difficult because there were 15 puppeteers under the table, and they kept telling me

not to move. It's difficult for an actor to stand around in one spot like that. [When they're there], the puppeteers take over the set."

Smith, a sci-fi veteran, thanks to INDEPENDENCE DAY, pointed out that it was Sonnenfeld's vision that made the whole thing work. "His humor is so off balance and coming in from so many different angles. That's really what the movie does. It will seesaw from some really scary dramatic moments, back into the comedy and within a comedic moment you're laughing, but it's really dark and scary."

To illustrate, Smith points to a scene where Jones blows a shopkeeper's head apart while



The film, which opens July 2, features aliens by Rick Baker, given a comic, anarchic spin by director Barry Sonnenfeld (above).

Smith looks on in horror. A moment later, the head grows back and the shopkeeper (actually an alien dealing in stolen goods) screams to Jones, "Do you have any idea how much that stings?" Smith explains: "You could play that either way, and Barry picked that interesting place right in the middle [between comedy and drama]. The guy says it stings, and it really does sting—it's not like a joke. No one's playing comedy in the movie, and that's what I really love about it." □

DARK PLANET

By Chuck Wagner

On a set in the Front Street Studios in Burbank, California, rested a spaceship. Lights flashed on control panels while uniformed crew gave and took orders, and the results were all recorded on film. Michael York, Harley Jane Kozak, Paul Mercurio, and Maria Ford were playing out a drama in a "tin can." The actors portrayed either Alphas (enhanced humans) or Rebels (normal humans or mutants)—battling factions from a nearly-destroyed Earth that have been thrown together aboard this one ship on a joint voyage to a recently discovered "dark planet," which may hold the key to human survival. At that moment in the script, the ship was under outside threat from a field of 100,000 space mines blocking entry to a wormhole which led to the planet.

The name of the film is DARK PLANET, written by J. Reifel and produced by John Eyres and Barnet Bain for EGM Film International. A 1997 release is planned, although no U.S. theatrical distribution is set at this time.

The film is under the direction of Albert Magnoli, best known for directing the Artist Formerly Known as Prince in PURPLE RAIN. "My friend, Barnet Bain, who's producing the film with John Eyres, told me he was doing this extremely ambitious concept—which was to do three films back-to-back on a sound stage. I found that really appealing. At that point there was no real discussion that I was going to do one; it was just, 'This is what I'm doing this summer' from Barnet. He had me come down and take a look at what he was doing, and I was immediately impressed with both the ambitious nature of the project and the fact that they were going to do the three of these things back-to-back, and essentially sets would be built and broken down and rebuilt for the next show.

"Barnet had a series of scripts that were in various stages of development," the di-

Albert Magnoli goes from PURPLE RAIN to outer space.



In the futuristic world of DARK PLANET, the devastating radioactive after-effects of six world wars have decimated most of the Earth's population.

rector added. "When I found out that my schedule was clear for this period of time, he sent me one of the scripts. It interested me. With a considerable amount of revisions [which Magnoli worked on himself without credit], we were able to get a project that we were all happy with. Then, before you know it, we were all here slaving on the third film of the three."

The other two sci-fi films were TIME LOCK and THE APOCALYPSE. "This is not a large-budget film, obviously. But what's really interesting is one's ability to get as much out of the production as he possibly can." Indeed, the spaceship sets are built to be re-styled, rearranged and reused for many scenes, and the look of those sets belied the low budget. Though the film is in the less-than-\$5 million range (approximately \$2-3 million for the production), the space ship internals were realistic—dense panels of flashing lights, controls, corridors, etc. To minimize the budget requirements,

set construction went on in parallel with the film shoot: the hammering stopped only when the call for "quiet!" rang out.

At one of the consoles was Harley Jane Kozak, replete with short blonde hair and military uniform. She looked like an Alpha, but: "I'm a mutant!" she explained during a break, smiling wryly. "We're a sub-class. My character was born a mutant, but they replaced the damaged part of my cortex when I was about seven years old and implanted a computer—which you don't see because I don't have it on yet." She pointed to the spot on her neck where it would go. "They're drying it with a blow-dryer right now. The effects of my character's mutancy have pretty much been erased, except I do wear a computer—my boyfriend's calling me 'Computerhead' now. And I have a little tiny allergic reaction to the glue." Kozak's character has no special powers—the computer merely allows her to function. She compared her character's state to that of her \$5000 computer at home—Ap-

ple had replaced failed components with used parts. But certainly, the comely Ms. Kozak bore no scar of "mutancy."

Paul Mercurio, whose Rebel character Anson Hawke sat beside Kozak's during that scene, was originally a dancer-choreographer who became famous in the film STRICTLY BALLROOM, then followed it with the S&M farce, EXIT TO EDEN. Mercurio was to do a space walk in an upcoming sequence. Mercurio explained, "It's not really a walk. I believe I'm going to be...falling down the side of a spaceship. At this stage I have no idea what's really happening. I know I'm outside the ship trying to get in. Now that may mean I'm walking on the ground, or down the side of the ship, but obviously I'm going to have to do something kind of slow."

Watching over it all—the filming, the set construction, and the effects which arrived on video tapes brought to the set—was John Eyres, the film's producer and co-

founder of EGM. Eyres' personal growth and evolution from British video chain owner to movie mini-mogul is an interesting tale itself, moving from Cardiff, Wales, to Hollywood. "We made the first movie in Cardiff," he recalled. "It was called GOODNIGHT, GOD BLESS. It was a little horror-suspense thing, shot on 16 mm. After that, the team "made another movie in the UK that was pretty successful, a sci-fi film called PROJECT SHADOWCHASER. It did real well and we decided to move here! We set up EGM about 5 years ago, and we've been making movies ever since."

Though EGM makes science-fiction films, this was not originally a creative choice. "When I started," Eyres explained, "I wasn't particularly a genre-driven science fiction fan. It was a business decision, quite frankly, at the time, because the genre is very well-accepted throughout the world."

But now, Eyres enjoys the medium. With a good beginning behind him, Eyres builds toward the future. "Maryann Ridini and I are working on a piece called THE RESURRECTION—a screenplay I've had for about three years—which is a very big BLADE RUNNER-type film." THE RESURRECTION is a sequel to EGM's successful PROJECT SHADOWCHASER film. Beyond that: "We're making a lot more movies—different types of genres, a whole slate of things. So we'll be going in different directions: drama, suspense-action, action, sci-fi...I'm having a series of meetings on a Clive Barker piece."

If DARK PLANET becomes a success, will it too become a franchise, like PROJECT SHADOWCHASER did? "In fact, during the revisions of DARK PLANET, we obviously have built in the sequel now," said director Magnoli. "Depending on what John Eyres decides, they will probably be doing the sequel." Will Magnoli direct the DARK PLANET sequel? "I'd be very interested in doing it. I actually have a project that is kind of firm right now, but it's probably going to take 2-4 months to finance it." □

MICHAEL YORK

The star of LOGAN'S RUN returns to the genre in DARK PLANET.

Front Street Studios are not ideally situated. Bounded on the north by the busy I-5 Freeway and on the south by active railroad tracks and a wood processing plant, they can be noisy. Undaunted by cars, trains, or wood planes, work goes on there. October 2, 1996 found the spaceship set of the movie DARK PLANET within one of the Front Street buildings. Albert Magnoli, the director, was in charge of the proceedings. But in charge of the scene was Michael York.

York's character, Captain Winter, is an Alpha—a genetically enhanced human in a scenario in which Earth society has nearly been wiped out. York himself required little enhancement. He appeared at a glance to be no older than when he starred in LOGAN'S RUN over twenty years ago. But he is not the product of artificial enhancement. "I was born in the country north of Oxford," York said. "I moved around a bit and then, of course, like many people ended up in London. It's a very small country." York's formal training was for the stage. "I was a member of the National Theater Company. Before that, I'd been in the usual repertoires."

But stage craft is purely linear. The part moves along through a night's performance. In film, take after take may be necessary, with long breaks in between. That day, York spent hours in the warm, cramped spacecraft set, sitting or standing in his crew seat, delivering the same lines over and over—very different from the freedom of the stage. "I've always learned by doing," the actor said. "Of course it's another way of life. But you always think of the end result. It's a question also of temperament. For



In the future world of DARK PLANET, Michael York (LOGAN'S RUN) plays an Alpha—a genetically enhanced human.

some people the theater is an absolute grind. You rehearse and then you do it. You do it and you do it and you do it. Whereas here, the great thing is every moment is a new adventure. Something new is always happening. Film has this organic life. You have a script, but once you put director, actors, script, and setting together you get a chemical reaction. You come out with maybe something you weren't anticipating at the beginning—which is always very exciting. And the characters grow. It's always a good moment when the character starts taking you over, dictating how it wants to be played."

York has had that chemistry work on many past films: LOGAN'S RUN, THE THREE (and FOUR) MUSKETEERS, to name a few. Did he feel it working with Albert Magnoli on DARK PLANET? "Yes, he's terrific!" York said with sudden enthusiasm. Indeed,

York seemed to enjoy the work.

But Michael York is remembered for more than just his fine portrayals—he's also renowned for his swashbuckling abilities—especially in Richard Lester's Musketeer films. "I was pretty hot then, yes!" York said with a grin. "That was all me! My double had gotten injured." Even now, York's sword wrist and physique appear ready for another duel; perhaps the next film will offer such a scene.

York is a wide-spectrum actor. He doesn't worry about titles: genre actor, Shakespearean actor, costume actor, mainstream actor. "I've done everything. But of course LOGAN'S RUN was a very influential science-fiction film. It was made years ago, but I find that it still appeals to audiences."

Having appeared months ago in BABYLON 5 and now DARK PLANET, does York worry about type-casting? "Not at all," he said. "At the moment I'm doing four films back-to-back. One is a comedy with Mike Myers and Elizabeth Hurley. The day I finish this I go to Paris to do a French film with Roger Vadim, playing a Russian orchestra conductor. After that, I'm in Texas playing a southern gentleman." Wide-spectrum indeed! (Later he confided that he'd been shown the pilot script for AMERICAN GOTHIC, but they never got back to him. One can imagine how the show might've been with Michael York in it.)

Ever the gentleman, York would not admit to having a favorite director. And to the question of which role or film of his is his favorite: "It's too early to look back," he said, with a sly smile, then added, "The next one." **Chuck Wagner**

Space Truckers

REANIMATOR director **Stuart Gordon** goes space truckin' round the stars.

When Stuart Gordon was a child, he dreamed of being an astronaut, but his poor eyesight put the kibosh on those plans. The closest he came was watching Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, which had a huge impact. "I still think that's the best space movie ever made," said Gordon. "I saw that movie about 100 times. I remember my reaction the first couple times I saw it was just a religious experience. I mean that movie was just out there; it was pure cinema—it really speaks in images, almost no words. There's about 20 minutes of dialogue in the whole movie. And the fact that Kubrick did as much homework as he did! The movie has not dated, and yet here we are almost at 2001, and it still seems a very believable movie. The science in it is great."

Gordon always wanted to direct a space movie that would follow the rules of space. "It sort of bothers me in STAR TREK that they walk around and there's no sense of them being in a spaceship," he said. He is also a fan of ALIEN, another solemn science fiction film, which conveyed the concept of future astronauts just being working class guys doing a job that happens to be in outer space. For SPACE TRUCKERS, he has combined the two influences and added a playful, twisted sense of humor.

Unlike a lot of studio pictures, SPACE TRUCKERS had only one screenwriter, Ted Mann. Mann, who has worked on such series as CIVIL WARS



Charles Dance as the villainous Captain Macanudo and Vernon Wells, as his henchman Cutt, pose with Stuart Gordon on the set of SPACE TRUCKERS.

and NYPD BLUE, concocted the story of independent space trucker John Canyon (Dennis Hopper) who transports genetically engineered pork to the far reaches of the solar system when he is coerced by a corporation into shipping a secret load past Earth's defenses to the home planet. He is joined in his quest by novice trucker Mike Pucci (Stephen Dorff) and waitress Cindy (Debi Mazar) after accidentally killing corporate flunky Keller (George Wendt).

"Ted and I just knocked out the scenes of the story together, and he would go out and write a draft," Gordon explained. "We would go over it together, and make changes. It was done very much in tandem. We were both frustrated astronauts, so we were on the same wavelength. The trick came in later when we

had to start dealing with the budget and realized that certain sequences as written would not be affordable, so Ted and I would go back and think about how could we do this simpler. Instead of having five locations, could we do the sequence in two?"

According to Gordon, the solutions he and Mann found often improved the sequences. "For example," he said, "in the earlier drafts, the InterPork henchmen hijack John Canyon's load, and there was this elaborate scene of him having to couple his rig to the back end of their booster and work his way across the cargo, break into the tow truck, where there's a fight, and it ends up with one of these characters getting sucked out through the window. The sequence was very elaborate,

and we realized that it was beyond us.

"In the simplified version, we loved the idea of the guy going through the window and so we hung on to that idea, but we reset the scene in the diner, and rather than it being the henchman, we made it into Keller, who is the major bad guy in the first third of the movie, the George Wendt character, and the sequence had a lot more impact as well, because it was somebody who really was a formidable adversary, rather than some minor character that you don't really know. It's one of the best sequences in the film, I think."

This alteration "tightened everything that came after it," said Gordon. "It accelerated the action and the tensions and the urgency." The characters are now responsible for the death of a dispatcher from the corporation, so they are forced to go on the lam and have a lot more at stake. In the process of eluding the police, they run into a group of space pirates, led by their cyborg captain Macanudo (Charles Dance) and his henchman Cutt (Vernon Wells), and eventually they discover that Canyon's truck is harboring BMWs—Bio-Mechanical Warriors, which are part of a corporate plot to take over the Earth.

Once the story was in place, Gordon elaborately planned out how to visualize it unlike any previous space opera. To achieve this, he brought in a variety of artists like Ron Cobb, Berni Wrightson, Hajime Sorayama, and Bruce McCall. Bringing these visions together and designing the overall movie is first-time production designer

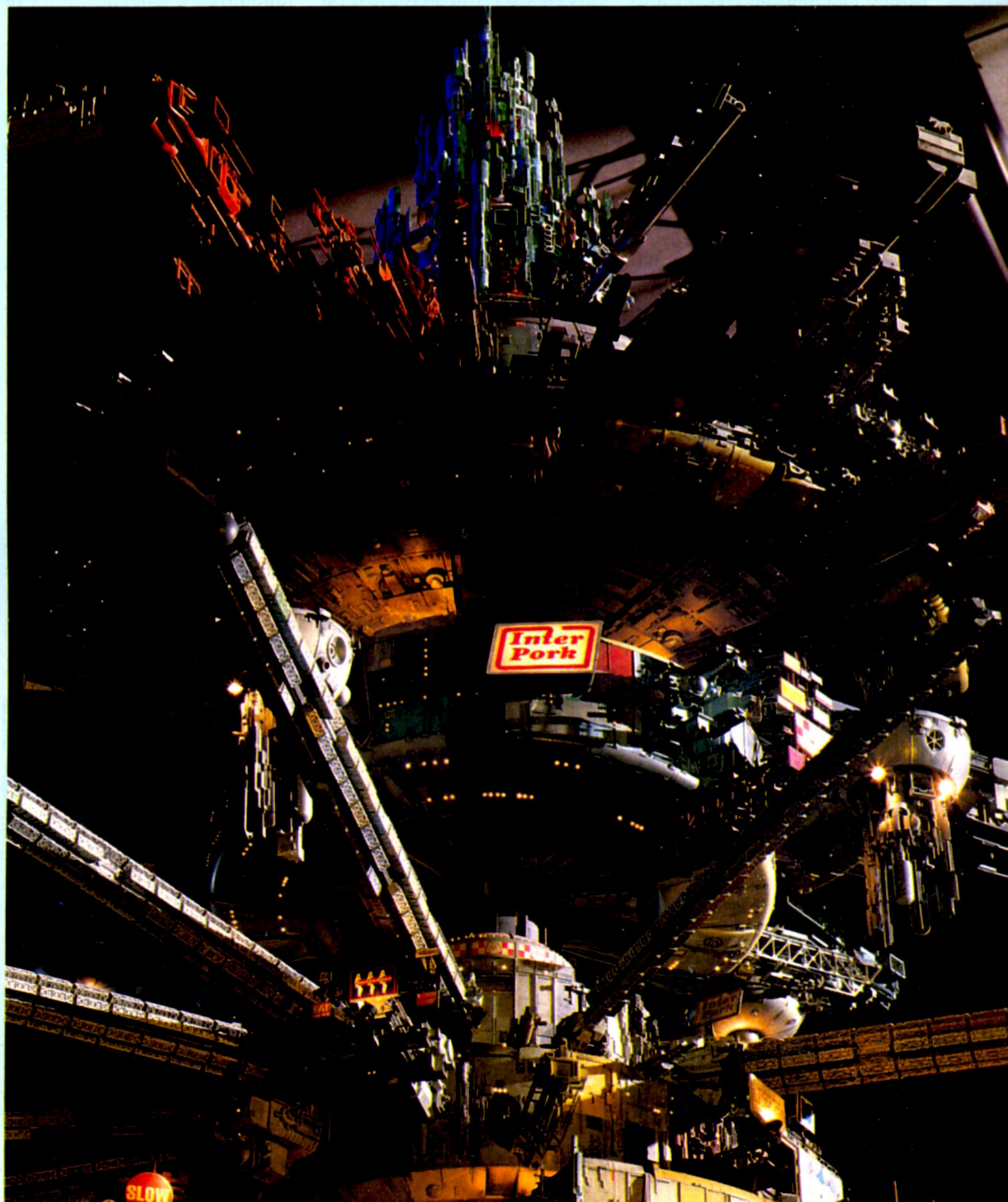
By Dennis Fischer

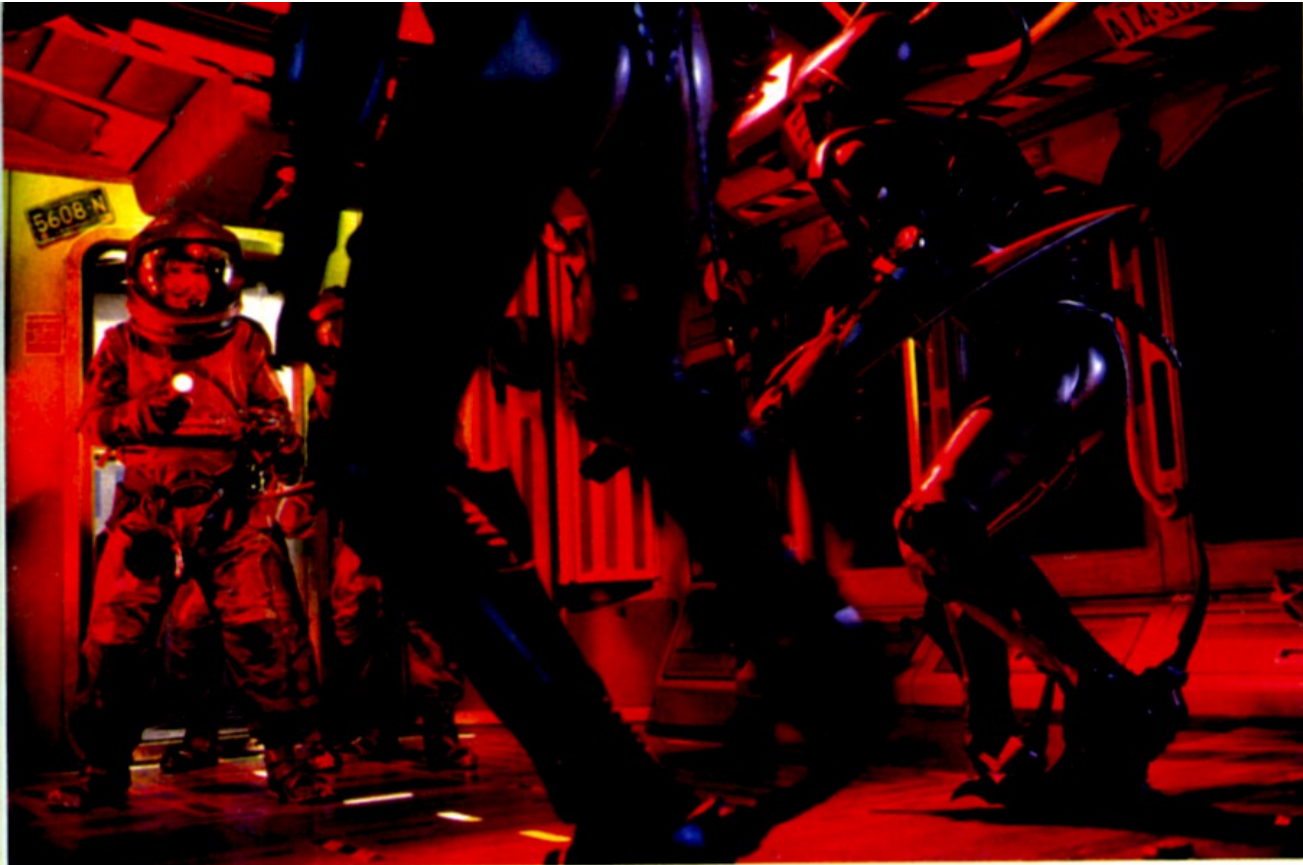


Above: Mike Pucci (Stephen Dorff), Cindy (Debi Mazar), and John Canyon (Dennis Hopper) in the cab of a space truck. Right: the "Hub," an orbiting space station, displays the corporate InterPork logo.

Simon Murton. "We deliberately did not want to use other films as references," Gordon explained. "Instead of going with a sterile, white NASA feeling, we went the opposite, into bright colors and a commercialized feel. In 2001, they built the wonderful set that spins 360 degrees. In our film that became the diner which looks like a Bob's Big Boy, so there's the juxtaposition of science fiction and the familiar."

Another important element in the design of the film came from costume designer John Bloomfield (*WATERWORLD*). According to Gordon, they started by looking at the actual spacesuits. "We have a book called *Space Gear*; it went through the whole evolution of the space suit from a study point," he said. "We also wanted the suit to look—rather than a real high-tech perfect suit—like a beat-up, used suit that John Canyon got with his used truck. It's like, when you change a tire: the gear you've got in your car is not pristine; it's well used and some of the pieces are missing." The result is a cross between a spacesuit and an old diving suit. "It's really a kind of clumsy, bulky-looking thing," Gordon recalled, "and then he did a more modern, spiffed-up version for what the new models are like. They're the slimmed-down,





The space truckers battle legions of Bio-Mechanical Warriors (or BMWs for short), designed by Hajime Sorayama. The robot legions, which John Canyon and his crew have been unwittingly transporting to planet Earth, are an invention of InterPork, designed to take over the world.

high-tech version.”

Bloomfield did a lot with plastic. “We moved away from natural materials and went for a lot of bright colors and corporate logos,” said Gordon. “The entire costume is covered in logos, kind of taking this idea about how people wear logos on their clothes. Basically, the logo becomes the clothes. In this futuristic world, we are walking billboards.

“He’s a very witty designer,” Gordon continued. “A lot of the things he did were strange but familiar at the same time. You see a lot of things like cowboy hats and baseball caps and things that have been with us for a long time and will probably be with us a few years from now, so that you can look at these guys and recognize them immediately as truck drivers, but they don’t look exactly like any truck drivers you’ve ever seen before.”

Once the film was written and designed, it needed to be cast. Gordon selected Dennis Hopper to play John Canyon because he was a fan of Hopper’s work and because he needed someone who conveyed the impression of being a veteran of life, a quintessential maverick. Hopper proved interested in playing a sympathetic character for a change. “Dennis Hopper has really been quite wonderful,” said Gordon, “because what he did from the very beginning is made it very clear that he wanted John Canyon to be a real person. I felt that his decision was right on the money. He felt that there was so much stuff in the movie that was strange and fun-

ny and weird, that there had to be somebody in there who grounded it. He really underplayed him and made him a very real guy and resisted getting too big with him, because if you do that, it’s like a parody of a parody and you end up with nothing. He wanted to be someone who the audience could relate to and think, ‘This is me in this situation.’ It’s a very rich portrayal. The fear in something like this is that it could turn into something like *SPACEBALLS*. In order for there to be real tension, there had to be characters that you cared about and were worried about, and Dennis was able to do that.

“He contributed a lot of things,” Gordon added. “The hat he wears is something that Dennis came up with. The costume designer had come up with a whole bunch of hats, and one of the hats that he made had a brim that would snap off so that you could wear it inside a space helmet. Dennis took a

look at it and just unsnapped it and wore it like that, and the result is a hat that looks very much like a rebel soldier’s in the Civil War when he wears it with the short brim, which I think really set up the sense that John Canyon was an independent trucker, a postmodern rebel. Visually, he’s telling us who this guy is.

“One of best lines in the movie is something that Dennis came up with right on the set, that was not scripted at all: after they have made a daring escape Mike says, ‘That’s some of the best driving I ever saw.’ Dennis just turns to him and says, ‘Pedal to the metal and played footsie with fate.’ The whole crew just sat there with their mouths hanging open, which was great.

“He was very much there for us. He was also supportive of the whole process when there were those delays. Other movie stars would have gotten nervous and gone with another project or bailed, but Dennis stuck with

us. Dennis brought in Stephen Dorff, and Stephen really idolizes Dennis. Stephen had some questions whether a film called *SPACE TRUCKERS* would be a good career move, and Dennis said to him, ‘You can have fun with this,’ and they really kind of bonded in a kind of father-son relationship.”

Dorff (*BACKBEAT*) plays Mike Pucci, who makes a deal with Cindy the waitress that if he can get her to Earth, she will marry him. “Stephen Dorff is like a young Dennis Hopper,” Gordon said. “In the story his character starts out wanting to work for the big corporation, but by the end of the movie he is an independent trucker. He becomes a young John Canyon. There’s even a line in the movie where John Canyon says, ‘I don’t want you to end up like me.’ Stephen Dorff says, ‘Heaven forbid.’ At that point you know he will.

“Stephen Dorff is like Dennis in that he approaches things very realistically. If he can’t believe it, he can’t do it. He took what was a very sketchy character in the script and fleshed him out to make him real. He caught on to what we’re going for. ‘White trash in space’ is how he put it, trailer park guys who are in space.”

Cindy is played by Debi Mazar (*Spice in BATMAN FOREVER*). Claimed Gordon, “I could actually say the part was written for her. Ted Mann and she worked together on a TV series called *CIVIL WARS*, where she played a secretary in a divorce attorney’s office. I used to watch the show and became a big fan of hers. When we were working on the first

Mike (Stephen Dorff) and Cindy (Debi Mazar) celebrate with a little interstellar foreplay—a scene that goes *BARBARELLA*’s zero-gravity striptease one better.



Space Truckers

DESIGN

Creating a low-tech, working class future.

One of the key members of the SPACE TRUCKERS staff is Simon Murton, an experienced art director making his debut as production designer with this film. In addition to previously working with Gordon on FORTRESS, Murton has provided designs for such films as THE CROW, STARGATE, and JUDGE DREDD. His father is English production designer Peter Murton, but Simon forsook England to come to the U.S. because of the greater opportunities offered here.

"My basic premise for what we did is that human beings—especially Americans—don't like change too much," explained Murton. "For example, the [space station's] diner, which was a plagiarism of 2001—the big circular set, but of course we couldn't do that, so we built just over a third. It was kind of funny to have this circular set with everyone strapped in and the food stuck down. By the side of the set you would have stunt men walking down these rubber mats, almost horizontal and walking down to vertical positions. It was very weird to watch, but it was nice to actually recreate a Denny's or a Bob's Big Boy—only it's in space—and use the same colors, the same kind of feeling for the whole thing. Let's face it, truckers, if they are driving across America or driving through space, are still going to be the same type of people."

Murton likes to research his work, and so he and Gordon went to truck stops and examined books detailing spacecraft interiors and such. "I like to have a good reference around me because usually truth is stranger than fiction," Murton claimed. "I always like to try and keep a certain logic in there, so the background is very believable. Everyone is getting sick and tired of things like in 2010, where everyone is inside of

the Russian spaceship and every surface is covered with buttons. Let's face it, even though it's [visually] boring, there's going to be a lot fewer buttons. One pushes oneself to make it look interesting and to make it look believable."

That believability was abetted by pre-production "field trips," according to Stuart Gordon, who added, "Simon likes to do a lot of research, so before we started working on the movie we went to a truck stop, to a guy who sold trucks, and we went to watch them unload container ships, what some people call 'seafaring trucking' and 'offshore trucking.' The containers that they bring are essentially truck trailers. What we discovered is that whole system, now accounting for 90% of all cargo, was invented by a trucking company.

"The idea is that the unit for transporting goods is the trailer of a truck. So we decided in our movie to do the same thing. We said that these trailers are not going to change; they are going to be the same in space as they are on earth, and instead of being pulled by ships, they'll be pulled by rocket-powered trucks. Watching the loading and unloading of them, the different colors of the containers, the enormous cranes and so on—it really helped us get a sense of the size that we were dealing with. Simon started doing the drawings based on that research."

Set 200 years into the future, when mankind is colonizing the other planets and moons of the solar system, the film presents space as a frontier, like the old American West, and it's the truckers who bring in the much-needed supplies. Gordon felt that the controls should be kept low tech, because these are just working class joes doing their jobs. "The truck, for example, has all the controls of a truck," said Gordon,



The interior of the circular orbiting space station, reminiscent of 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, decorated to look like a Denny's-type restaurant.

"steering wheel and pedals on the floor for acceleration and breaking. We wanted an audience to look at this thing and say, 'I could drive that, it's not that far out.'"

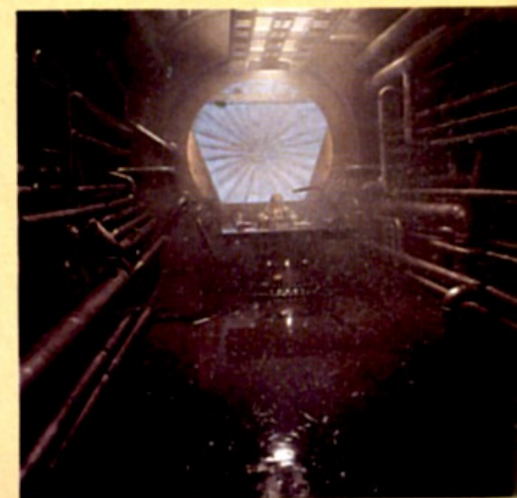
Gordon added, "One of the things we noticed about the way people deal with the future is that they want things to be recognizable and familiar, and to certain degrees, they will just make themselves feel more comfortable. Even though in space there is no up or down, we want one and we have to have one. You have to create those things just to maintain a sense of well being."

In designing Canyon's trucker's cab, Murton explained, "I was trying to use the technology of the space shuttle and mix it in with what someone's cabin was going to look like after three months in space, how it would be personalized and trashed. Would he wear clean socks, or would he wear socks at all? It was quite fun that way.

"There was also a problem in shooting it in that you have three actors and a film crew in this small, cramped kind of area. I seem to remember the d.p. complaining bitterly about it, but I didn't feel—like for one space trucker—making the starship *Enterprise* bridge."

The space trucks in the film are rocket rigs that haul enormous loads throughout the solar system. "Apart from 2001, nobody has really shown the solar system. Everyone has conveniently gone out a bit further. I would like to see more space movies that actually take place within the solar system," said Murton. "Originally, it was going to be traveling across space, but we all thought, 'Let's face it: even 300 years in the future, that was going to be ridiculous.' Stuart wanted it to be 300 years in the future, and we brought it back to 150 years in the future.

"We took inspiration from the big, long freight trains out here," Murton continued. "I went for the



Left: production designer Simon Murton had to come up with a look for the pirate ship *Regalia* that could believably "swallow" Canyon's two-mile-long trucker rig. Above: an example of Murton's low-tech view of the future.

three-tiered container in the Y-shaped configuration, because it made the interiors and the exteriors kind of interesting—we could do a trick where we turn the camera on its side and the actor looks like he's walking on one of the sides. It was a bit of a bother to work out the continuity sometimes. You can design all these elements, but the character's got to go from A to B to C, and whatever way they cut it, it has to be in a kind of logical progression."

Gordon also wanted to explore the idea of the future of private enterprise in space. "A company is not going to spend that kind of money on exploration and settling space without putting a corporate logo on everything they touch," Gordon declared. "Rather than the silver and white sterile worlds you see in so many science fiction movies, you get just the opposite. We've made it colorful and tacky.

"Another thing we learned," Gordon continued, "is that people get starved for color in space, because you look out your window and all you see is black. One of the things we talked about is when they had the Skylab, the astronauts got so starved for color that they began watching the color bars on the TV screen. We decided to go with some really bright colors and that commercialization—that they would be selling stuff—so when you're flying into the space station, this is what you'll see, a clutter. Not a well-designed space station, but a modular mess where stuff has just been added on and stuck on.

"I also think it's the way it would be in space, with everything modular. You would constantly send things up which would be added on, so it's not like it's just been designed by some master architect. It probably starts out as a much smaller thing they did. This

is the first section that was there, and then all the rest of the stuff was added on to it and just stuck together and built onto it.

"It's funny, because we had some great designers on this movie, and I would have to say to them it should be badly designed, like the Mount Lakemore projects—a mixture of styles, and there are different places in the movie that you go to that each has its own style to it."

Former advertising and *National Lampoon* artist Bruce McCall designed most of the film's satirical billboards and advertisements. According to Murton, "We ended up really using Bruce for the signage and advertising and stuff, because he used to be a very big advertising art director. He came up with some really funny stuff. 'Laxigo—Go, go, go with Laxigo.' It's nice having someone come in and just do that kind of stuff. He also came up with the Captain Macanudo look. Bruce throws these wonderful, crazy ideas together; he's fun for that kind of look. It's like driving along the highway with billboards, but we wanted to do it in space.

Stuff like that made it work quite well. I would like to have seen more of it."

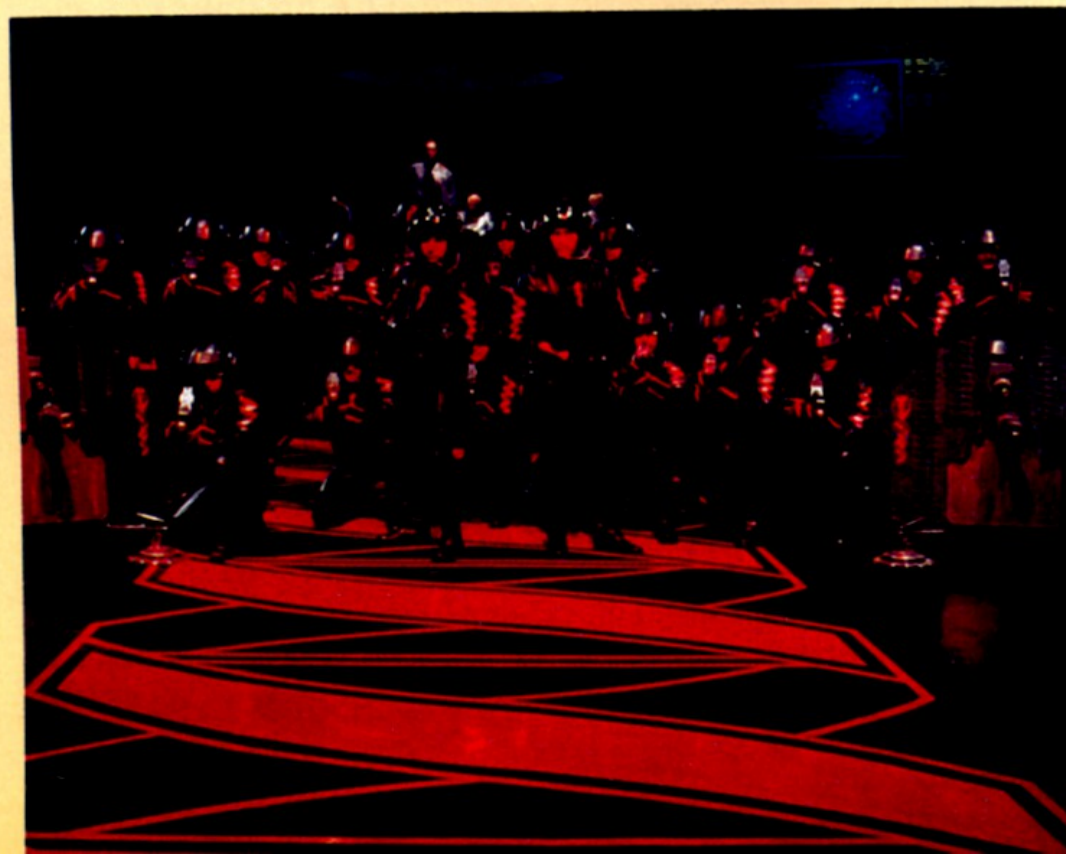
"The thing about creating a movie like this is that you are really creating a whole world," explained Gordon. "You get down to all the little details of that world. Some of the details I don't think really make it into the film because they are so small, unless you do a macro-close-up of a label on a packet of cigarettes. They put a sign that said, 'These cigarettes will kill you. What do we have to say here?' Or there is a sign in the hospital that says, 'If you can pay, we can care.' Little details like that." For example, on the thousand dollar bills, the designers added a sticker good for a burger and fries at McDonald's. The money is also labeled, "The United States of America, a Subsidiary of Tokyo Bank."

One of Murton's important design challenges was designing the interior and exterior of the space pirate ship, the *Regalia*, which was rendered in CGI by Electric Image. "I wanted to make this huge radical space liner that ends up looking like a massive U-boat. I felt very

strong about doing it like a very retro, old rusty ocean liner type of thing. We know that things don't rust in space, but at that point I didn't care, I just thought it was a very good looking design," said Murton. "It was a really difficult design to do, because of what Ted Mann had written or what Stuart had come up with. This is the problem with a lot of shows: the director wants a parameter; it is written as another parameter; and confines of the budget or time are another parameter; and you have to try to punch them together and see what you come out with. Like Stuart always wanted this rotating gravity type of thing; plus we needed to get the space truck into the *Regalia*, and the truck is two miles long with all its containers, so it's like 'How the hell are we going to come up with something that's going to work out and visually look good?' Eventually we came up with an Eiffel Tower on its side—that kind of rationalization."

Still, Murton has found designing *SPACE TRUCKERS* to be both a unique, enjoyable experience. "I had a lot of fun with the movie," he said. "I could do different things. It didn't have to be the normal sci-fi look; I think everyone is getting sick and tired of hardware—it's been done to death. 2001 and *ALIEN* still did it better than most people. This is why films like *CITY OF THE LOST CHILDREN* are so refreshing. That's a bit industrial, but it had a certain style and look which was very cool. Unfortunately the story failed a bit, but the visuals and the action was pretty wild. I don't know if *SPACE TRUCKERS* does look like any other sci-fi movie, but it's pretty wacky. The story itself, about a space trucker hauling strange cargo, gave us the inspiration of doing normality here, but throwing curves and just doing some wacky stuff." **Alan Jones**

Space marines prepare to face the Bio Warriors on one of Murton's glossier sets, contrasting with the used look of John Canyon's working class rig.



couple of drafts, the part was very bland and uninteresting, and Ted and I were talking about some ways to develop the character, and at one point, one of us mentioned why don't we make it to Debi Mazar and from that point on, the part just took on a life of its own. She came in and read the part. There were no doubts that she should play that part."

Gordon originally went with Ron Houser for the part of Captain Macanudo, who has been partially disintegrated and rebuilt, his inner workings visible through a transparent plastic shell. But the actor was replaced partway into shooting. Explains Gordon, "He is a wonderful actor, but it was one of those situations where his style of acting was at odds with what everyone else was doing. While everyone else was trying to ground their performances for the audience, Ron went in the opposite direction a bit."

To replace him, Gordon went with Charles Dance, who had also been under consideration for the part. "Charles Dance was a happy accident, in a way," Gordon recalls. "We were staying at the same hotel as he was, in London, and ran into him in the lobby one day and described the movie, and he said, 'Let me look at the script. About a week later, I got a call from him that he wanted to play Captain Macanudo. I found out later that he had liked the script but wasn't sure as this character was very different from anything that he had ever played before, and he showed it to his teenage daughter who said, 'This is great, Dad. You should do this.' That convinced him. No one has ever seen him play comedy before, and he's wonderful. He had to undergo four to six hours of makeup every day to play the part, but again, he found a way to humanize a character who could have been just a cartoon, and there is this almost sexy quality about him as well, even though he's half man and half machine. There is still a charisma that comes through all that makeup. By the end of it, you really like him. It's funny, he saw the movie in Spain, and his wife said it was just terrible the character was not going to be around if there's a sequel. I said,

WORKING CLASS HERO

"Dennis Hopper has really been wonderful," said Stuart Gordon. "He really underplayed and resisted getting too big. He wanted to be someone the audience could relate to."



Director Stuart Gordon confers with his star Dennis Hopper, who was happy to play a sympathetic leading character after years of psycho-villainy.

'Well, in this kind of movie, being blown up does not mean you won't be around for the sequel.'"

Also on hand is Barbara Crampton, who starred in Gordon's first few features. "Barbara Crampton is an old friend," he said. "We were trying to find an actress to play a very small but pivotal role, and we needed a sense that she and Debi Mazar were related to each other. Barbara is a wonderful mimic, and after spending a little time with Debi, she was able to get the accent down, so the two of them seemed like they were two peas from the same pod."

With script, pre-production and cast apparently in place, Gordon went to Ireland to shoot—when disaster seemingly struck. "We went to Ireland because we were promised half the budget from our investors provided we shot there," Gordon explained. "Then less than half a month before we started, it turned out the Irish producer who had promised us £7 million

had only £2 million."

Gordon credits his American producers, Peter Newman and Greg Johnson, for not abandoning the project. "I assumed that was it," said the director, "but they went out and scrambled and found other producers and the movie never even had to shut down. The Irish government helped the film, which was made under Section 35, by which the Irish government would put up a portion of the film's budget in exchange for filmmakers using Irish facilities and labor. But this was the first time that the government ever granted two Section 35s. For the first Section 35 we did not meet the terms, because the producer had not provided the correct amount of money. So the Irish government said, 'We will allow you to post a second time for new investors to help you complete the film.' A new producer, Morgan Sullivan, came on board, one of the most renowned Irish producers, and he straightened out the mess and got us back on track, along with Peter Newman and Greg Johnson, and Guy Collins brought Goldcrest in with a lot of in-

vestors. Goldcrest would only come in if we did all the post-production work in London, so this is the first movie where I had to do the post-production as well as production away from home. What was originally to have been a three-month stint became over a year abroad."

Regarding working in the U.K., Gordon reported, "I like Ireland very much, and the crew was sensational. This was not an easy movie to make. Every single shot had some level of difficulty—if it wasn't zero gravity, it was creatures or prosthetics or pyro. It was never just simply two people sitting in a shot. The schedule was not that different from an ordinary film. We had an eleven-week period, which is still pretty tight for a normal movie, and our crew was very disciplined and quick and had wonderful attitudes. There never was any grumbling or complaining."

Murton remembers it a little bit differently. "There were a lot of moments when we thought it wasn't going to make it," he said. "I had to send out letters for me and my crew saying, 'If we don't get paid, we're leaving.' That happened a couple of times, because sometimes we were three weeks in arrears, and they were trying desperately to bring money in. It certainly wasn't a very smooth road, but we fought hard enough and it came through. My hat goes off to the American producers who kept it going, when we thought, 'Well, that's it.' What they went through would send a lot of other people into the looney bin."

Initially the production rejected Ireland's Ardmore Studios because it did not have a stage large enough to encompass the scope of the production; however, it soon became apparent that Ardmore was the only true studio set-up in the country. Production designer Murton wanted a large stage for the *Regalia* interior. "I'm a great believer in using light to build a set," he said. "If you can't build it physically, we can use some good old theatrical tricks to make it work, and sometimes you need the space to throw light through stuff, and we didn't have that [at Ardmore]. We started looking in other areas. The only thing that

was big enough was these old ex-meat storage places; unfortunately, they ended up being a very dangerous site because they have all this insulation that was highly flammable. Someone should have booked up Ardmore just in case, but we didn't because we thought we were going somewhere else, so time was wasted."

Gordon became concerned that if production did not begin on time, he might lose his cast. "Our start date would have to be pushed back about six months," he recalled, "and our first reaction was, 'We have commitments to people to start at a specific time,' and so we explored other ways of making the film. One was converting a warehouse into a studio, and the space [available] was a huge meat carving facility with these gigantic refrigerators, which were about the size of a large sound stage. Unfortunately, the costs of converting it would have been the whole budget of the film; also, the time to get it ready would take up the six months that we'd be waiting anyway to get into Ardmore, so we decided to use the extra time to work and plan some more."

Another key member of the *SPACE TRUCKERS* production team was Paul Gentry, an experienced effects man with films such as *MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL*, *ADDAMS FAMILY*, and *THE LAST ACTION HERO* to his credit. He had worked with David Allen on *DOLLS* and *ROBOT JOX*, and also worked previously with Gordon on *FORTRESS* and photographed the Iwerks interactive *ALIENS AT THE SPEED OF FRIGHT* ride, which Gordon directed. "Stuart thought the *ALIENS* ride film was a training ground, a dry run for *SPACE TRUCKERS*," explained Gentry. "A lot of things we did for *SPACE TRUCKERS*, we did on that ride. Stuart hadn't a lot of experience with paramilitary soldiers firing weapons—you didn't see those kinds of things in *RE-ANIMATOR*, so it was great. I introduced him to certain things which he didn't know the camera could do, just little tricks of

FAMILIAR FUTURE

"In 2001, they built the set that spins 360 degrees. In our film that became a diner like a Bob's Big Boy, so there's a juxtaposition of science fiction and the familiar."



Interruption of the rotation of the orbiting space diner creates some zero-gravity chaos for Canyon (Hopper) and one of the waitresses, Cindy (Mazar).

the trade, such as the use of lighting strikes, which is a very basic tool of the industry, but it's interesting to use it in a battle scene. Traditionally, lighting strikes are used to create lighting effects. Of course, you can change the color of it, which makes it more the color of a gunflash, so you can have several lighting strikes going off in the background, and then you have soldiers firing in the foreground, and it makes it appear much bigger than it is because you have flashing all over the place. It creates a lot of excitement, and it's something Stuart hadn't used before, and on top of that you throw in white frames in editorial."

One of the biggest problems faced by the special effects crew in *SPACE TRUCKERS* was zero gravity, which, Gordon notes, "is something you don't see in too many space movies any more. It's expensive and very time consuming, but we felt that it was important enough to spend the time to do it. Unlike Ron Howard, we couldn't afford to send people up in the *Vomit Comet* and get real zero gravity, so we had to find another way to do it. Some of the solutions

were very simple. Sometimes we used string; other times we would turn things upside down. The best solution sometimes was to have the actors play weightlessness, and we were able to convincingly portray weightlessness just by the way they moved their bodies."

To assist with the weightless wire work, Gordon hired a stunt coordinator from *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* and *POWER RANGERS*, Koichi Sakamoto, who had done work in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States, and who spoke English. Many of the stuntmen on the project were Asian martial artists and acrobats. "We had a perfect stunt team: Apple Stunts it's called," said Gordon. "They did some amazing things. We had a sequence where a guy takes a punch and flips end over end for 30 feet into a wall. This was all done right there live on the set. As a matter of fact, in terms of the zero gravity, there was very little in the way of optical effects."

Recalled Gentry, "Koichi and I did these augmented scenes of this whole battle going on. We had limited time, only four days, and we all realized

we needed two weeks for this elaborate sequence because it's so difficult setting up these stunt shots. One guy [Tatsuro Koike], absolutely the most fearless stunt guy I've seen, was slamming into this or that. He looked like he'd just broken his neck. You'd yell, 'Cut! Tatsuro, are you all right?' You'd think he's dead, and he'd just look up and smile. 'That OK?'

"It's going to be hard to watch *SPACE TRUCKERS* and not see the same faces scene after scene, doing any stunts that are going on. Tatsuro we had in any costume imaginable—it was funny. You do things safely, and with a certain amount of care, it takes time. These things can't be rushed; it's counterproductive. We barely got through them by the skin of our teeth."

Since there was not a lot of money left over for wire removal, most of the wire work had to be hidden by the cinematographer while on set. "I think it's a testament to Mac Ahlberg, our cinematographer, who's an expert at this," said Gordon. "Part of the solution was built into the set design. Simon Murton was aware we'd have to hide wires, so he designed the set to have all kinds of strips on it. It fakes your eye out, allows the background to camouflage the wires."

"I wanted the lines in the set going the other way to make the sets look wider," said Murton, "but they had the problem that they weren't going to have enough money to do wire removal. Stuart wanted to do realistic space freefall, and in reality, we should have had the set on a gimbel, but we never had the money nor the time to do it properly, so we came up with something like the space shuttle where they have these velcro pads absolutely everywhere so they can stick things like cameras or paraphernalia to the walls to keep them from floating around and bumping into things. We just did all these vertical lines to help camouflage the cables. I'd say 70% of the time it works. The other 30% it didn't. Sometimes you see it; sometimes you don't."

Gordon employed simple misdirection to prevent viewers from spotting the wires. "When you're looking at somebody

Space Robots

HAJIME SORAYAMA

Bio-Mechanical robot designer.

floating, the audience always looks above him for the wires," the director explained, "but if you shoot it upside down, tilting the camera in some strange way, the wires are below, where you're not expecting to see them. There are a couple of shots in the movie where the wires are clearly visible—they are not hidden at all—but nobody has ever spotted them because they are looking in the wrong place. There are places where we did have to do some wire removal, but I think the total number of wire removal shots in the whole movie was something like three, thanks to Mac and Simon's ingenuity, which saved us a fortune."

Filming in Ireland proved a fairly copacetic experience. The shore of Dublin Bay ended up filling in for White Sands, New Mexico. The Dublin Civic Center, considered an eyesore by the inhabitants because its modern design clashes with the pastoral countryside, proved an idea location for a hospital scene. The Irish and English crew members largely got along, but the resumption of hostilities during post-production created some nervousness on the part of the director.

As Gordon noted, "I was there when the truce was on, and it was really some of the best feeling between England and Ireland, and then right as we started post-production, the bombings started again. It was done outside of Ardmore in Ireland and also in London, and I was going back and forth between the two on a regular basis. There was a bombing about a block away from where the post-production house was in London, which was nerve-wracking. There were a lot of discussions because half the crew was Irish and the other half English, and they had all been able to work together as a team, and all of this broke out again, and there were a lot of discussions how to solve this problem. As an American, this seemed like something that should be settled fairly easily, and they would look at me like I was an idiot. It is very complicated and there doesn't seem to be any easy answer."

It was while Hajime Sorayama, famed as the designer of sexy robots, was having his first show in Los Angeles at the Tamara Bane Gallery in the spring of 1994 that director Stuart Gordon contacted him on opening day and asked him to design SPACE TRUCKERS' biomechanical robot warriors. One of the key images in the film is the moment when Captain Macanudo and his companions encounter the as-yet unfully formed menacing being for the first time: the embryonic warriors—created by Dr. Nabel (Charles Dance, in a dual role) to be phenomenally lethal, capable of wiping out legions of highly trained and well-equipped space marines—adorn the sides of the cargo hold like obscene crosses, from which mechanical tentacles sprout and upraised thighs quickly become legs.

When asked what inspired his conception of the bio-engineered warriors, Sorayama responded, "I imagined nautiluses. They have about 90 tentacle-like feelers and with these feelers they catch their food. When you think about that, isn't it amazing? I explained to Mr. Gordon how I came up with the idea when I drew the design of the Bio-Mechanical Warrior: In the past three to four years, I became very interested in the forms of plants' roots, branches, organs of insects, tentacles of sea anemone, and [their similarity to] blood vessels such as arteries or veins. If they have their own wills and energy and move on their own, how amazing it must be! When I was drawing this, I was imagining armory which is a combination of the organic body of plants or insects and high-tech metals and plastics. These tentacles work like radar or sensors. If there is some sound in the direction of four o'clock, one tentacle moves in that direction."

In creating his design, Sorayama had to keep in mind the rapid, fluid movements that were expected of the BMWs. Indeed, by using female dancers in the roles, the



Above: one of Hajime Sorayama's design sketches for the robot warriors. Inset: Sorayama.



film does manage to create menaces which are both graceful and lightning quick in their lethality. Still, what is drawn on a page cannot always be reproduced on a soundstage, particularly if it has to be inhabited by human beings. "The image can't always be reproduced in 3-D," Sorayama explained. "One hundred percent of the realization of my idea is almost impossible, so we have to find a way to compromise in the best way. The process of realization of the design came as a result of continual compromises during its creation."

Makeup surrealist and artist Screaming Mad George was given the difficult assignment of bringing Sorayama's concepts to life. Sorayama commented on George's efforts, saying, "Screaming Mad George felt from the beginning that building a perfect realization of my design was just physically impossible, so he put great effort to make me realize this. The reality is you have to learn to compromise, because it is almost impossi-

ble to reproduce two-dimensional designs into three dimensions exactly how we wish. I think Screaming Mad George did an excellent job, and I really appreciate his proper advice to me during the course of this project. I really would like to work with him again."

Sorayama has long held an interest in making films and relishes the challenge of working on future film projects. "It makes me very excited and gives me ecstasy to have all those other people's help in making my fantasy come true," he noted. Originally, he intended to have a more hands-on approach to the production of the BMWs, but he realized that it would be better to leave make-

up effects to specialists who know that field while restricting his labors to what he does best: design.

Overall, in assessing his experience on the film, the artist noted, "There are many things I experienced for the first time.

The whole experience was very new and fresh to me. Although I enjoyed the process of making it very much, I realized that the reality of it was a lot of physical labor, a lot of sweat, and human wave tactics—e.g. psychological tensions—and that makes me a little sad."

Regarding the film itself, Sorayama noted, "I saw the premiere of the movie SPACE TRUCKERS in Tokyo in September. I enjoyed it very much and I am pleased so much. There are many details that made me enjoy it. Mr. Gordon's own world of retrospective reality in sci-fi movie-making is so unique." **Dennis Fischer**

(Special thanks to Miharu Yamamoto of ArtSpace in New York for relaying my questions for Mr. Sorayama and translating his responses).

Space Truckers

MAKEUP EFFECTS

Optic Nerve provides PG-13 gore and mayhem.

By Dennis Fischer

On *SPACE TRUCKERS* John Vulich (whose company, Optic Nerve, had contributed to Gordon's *CAS-TLE FREAK*) was brought in at the production design phase of the project. "At that point I was talking to them about doing all of the effects on the film," he recalled. "We broke it down into three really major categories. There were dummies, all the dead bodies of the characters killed by these creatures, body effects; there were the creatures; and there was Macanudo, who was the main bad guy."

It was decided to break up the makeup effects chores. Greg Cannon, who won the Academy Award for *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* and *MRS. DOUBTFIRE*, was selected to head the Macanudo design team, with his associate Scott Oshita taking care of all the on-site chores. Screaming Mad George wound up executing the Bio-Mechanical Warriors designed by Hajime Sorayama (*see sidebar*).

All other makeup effects for the film were handled by Vulich's Optic Nerve, with the on-site chores executed by technical makeup supervisor Mike Measimer, assisted by John Snyder. "Stuart knew we did the best gore in the business, so we ended up doing a lot of the gore-type stuff," said Vulich. "He wanted something that had never been done before, and he also wanted to get away with a lesser rating. He wanted the visceral impact of serious gore, but he wanted it to be almost pretty in a way. So we had to figure out a way to make that work."

One bizarre effect created by Vulich was the genetically engineered, box-like, stackable swine that John Canyon transports for UniPork. "That was always Stuart's joke," he said. "Wouldn't it be funny if they were like pig boxes, so you could stack and maximize their storage space, which I thought was a brilliant idea."

"We made these pigs kind of square, going back and forth design-wise. Simon



One of Optic Nerve's crew snips a little rubber from the prosthetic head of one of the victims of the Bio-Mechanical Warriors. Gordon wanted only PG-13 gore in the film.

Murton came up with his version of it, and then we sculpted it and sent Stuart off some Polaroids. He wanted everything to be squared, the nose, the eyes; he just wanted everything to echo the square shape, and since it was a cartoon film, I think they work fine. We tried to make the pigs as realistic as possible in texture and detail and paint job, with wrinkles and all that, but ultimately, they are square, and it's a little bit of a cartoony concept and there's only so far that you can go with it. There's a little bit of that aspect, but I think in the context of that film, every project has its own requirements, and on this one, anything goes. It's OK for them to be that way."

Originally, Optic Nerve planned to manufacture some 40 or 50 of the cubist porcine creatures, but in the interests of economy eventually settled for between 25 or 30 exteriors with four mechanically operated boars for closeups. "One of them was a fully mechanized puppet with a lot of different lip snarls, tongue wiggling, nose, eye blinks, ears and all that," explains Vulich. "Then there were two that maybe just had eye blinks and maybe another one that just had ear wiggles. There were different ranges of organization. The way it was storyboarded, you really only see one where I think he's supposed to be feeding it a hot dog, which is another Gordon joke. We had one that had to be really intricate to hold up

for that."

Another makeup handled by Optic Nerve was the scene in which Keller gets sucked out a hole that gets blown in a window. "We had to do a head cast of George Wendt, and he actually wasn't available at the time, so we had one of the guys sculpt this agonized face going through the hole," said Vulich. "That was one of those real quick cuts, so it was a simple puppet that didn't require any mechanization or anything like that. It was one of those puppets that is really ideal because its eyes are closed, it's making an expression, and there's already some dynamics there. One of the hardest things to do in our business is doing a mechanical puppet of a living person. It is very rare, it's ever been done right, and it's phenomenally expensive. There is just something about the character of the eyes that is really hard to replicate, so it was one of those things where it was a good situation for us. You had a great expression, the eyes are closed, there are just some quick cuts of him slamming through there, so we designed this beanbag-like dummy of him, with a really rough armature and this material that collapsed in on itself and pulled through there."

"We planned on doing it two different ways," Vulich continued. "We wanted to start off with him and actually cut the set away, to make it look like he went through a small hole. Actually the hole is cut bigger than it is, but his clothing is hiding that. There's a beat where he's trapped in agony like that, and there's a second beat and he gets sucked all the way through it, and at that point, it's our dummy being pulled through it. It was just a matter of playing with the right materials we could get to collapse right and design the understructure of the clothing that would just pull through with this collapsible armature. It was a little scissor-like thing."

Vulich has become a great believer in working with silicon rather than latex to



One of *Optic Nerve's* more bizarre makeup effects is a female android whose face is pulled open to reveal a touch-tone keypad inside the region of the mouth.

achieve a more lifelike look. "We did the head in a silicon-type material because it has a more life-like texture, and punched in the hair, did a lot of detail," he said. "As usual, we end up putting two or three months of work into something you see for seven frames, but whether it's seven frames or seven hundred, it has to hold up for that moment; otherwise, it's useless. There are only so many shortcuts that you can take. In this case, the shortcut was we didn't have to worry too much mechanically about what was going on, those expressions, but cosmetically it had to look like him."

Silicon is a much more lifelike material for makeup effects, but there are still problems in terms of finding appropriate adhesives that will adhere to skin and silicon. "I think it's got to be the next step in technology—makeup to get out of using foam latex, which is a wonderful material but also has a lot of limitations," said Vulich. "Silicon, however, is more expensive, definitely, but you also find a lot less of a reject rate. The cost of material in any project is nowhere near as extensive as the cost of the labor involved. For what you're getting out of it, I certainly think it's worthwhile. You paint them with silicon and silicon chalking, like what you use to seal an aquarium. You thin that out and mix colors into it. It's better than something like vinyl—they are really compara-

ble lookwise, but vinyl when you paint it sometimes tends to bleed through after a few months."

Nevertheless, vinyl proved to be exactly the right material for one of the film's more startling effects. "The dowager, the woman in the bathroom that's a robot, that's the other effect we did that's similar to the George Wendt thing," said Vulich. "That head we did in vinyl, because we needed it to stretch 300-400%, so we pushed the envelope as far as plasticizing it as far as we could plasticize it before it just wouldn't work any more. For that, silicon would have been a little trickier. Silicon is more durable in a denser state, it's actually better lasting than vinyl, but vinyl is more flexible. You can't plasticize the silicon because it tears a little easier.

"This woman had a wonderful face, just really great," Vulich continued. "We sculpted it with the eyes open, took a lot of great care to try and capture the character and all that. She already had a nice big mouth to begin with. We also came up with a keypad. The keypad actually worked—you could hit a button and things would go off. Stuart even wanted to make a sound on set—he knew he'd replace the sound later—just something to lend a reality. We put a little beeper in it, a little Radio Shack kind of thing. We played around with different modes of plasticity, and I was amazed at how wide you could do this before it would rip apart. It seemed to work pretty well."

Optic Nerve was also assigned the task of depicting the victims of the Bio-Mechanical Warriors. "Stuart wanted something visceral but not gory," recalled Vulich. "He wanted to go for—not necessarily a family picture, but something a little bit more wider in appeal. He knew he had to come up with something not bloody but almost pretty in a way. Somewhere, I came up with the idea of opalescent colors. I just theorized off the top of my head: let's say it hit your atoms; it does something so different

Optic Nerve built the UniPork swine that have been genetically engineered into a squared-off shape, in order to maximize storage space.



The dummy for George Wendt is sucked out a window into the vacuum of space. Quick cutting allowed for minimal mechanical articulation.

to your atoms that it disembodies them and all of a sudden you see these opalescent colors, almost like what happens when you burnish metal and it has a blue opalescence, like tempered steel—almost like the reaction steel would have, but on your flesh, just something totally different happens, so you don't see blood pouring out, you see all these kind of golds and greens and all these weird colors.

"We did all these tests," continued Vulich, "and it sounds like a ludicrous idea, but it actually looked interesting, like something weird and molecular was going on, and Stuart seemed really pleased with that. It was just a matter of working with metallic powders and opalescent powders, all these different kinds of almost garish colors, and then we also experimented a lot with mixing these powders with things like Alka Seltzer and different foams and stuff like that to get it to foam up almost like it was disintegrating. They also did some tests with computer graphics to mix in this look like everything is breaking up into balls, something similar to *LAWNMOWER MAN*, that whatever cell structures that make up the body break up and keep getting smaller and smaller into this dust or foam. So instead of shredded meat and tissue, it was more like balls of green and metallic things, like we're disintegrating these things. I think with the tone being a little bit more comic, these ideas work fine with it. It's hard to say if it would work in a different context or not. It was just another example of trying to do something different than what's been done before, which is really typical of Stuart's work." □



Charles Dance in makeup by Oscar-winner Greg Cannom. Cannom's work took from four to six hours to apply.

Having finished post-production, SPACE TRUCKERS now must find its audience. It has been aided in this regard with good word of mouth from festival appearances, which is scheduled to be followed by overseas distribution early this year. "It was very well reviewed at the Sitges Festival," claimed Gordon. "It also played the Tokyo Festival; although I was not present there, the report I got was that it was very well received there—spontaneous applause and a lot of laughs."

Naturally, Gordon is concerned with how his film, which has yet to find a U.S. distributor, will be marketed. "We're showing it to the studios now and hoping we'll have our deal soon," said Gordon. "It's a strange movie, the largest-budgeted independent one in some time. I think we have to make the right deal for the picture; we can't just give it away, because it has a pretty big sized price tag on it. We have to find the right company who understands it, because it's not your typical movie. It requires a very creative campaign to let people know what it is. I hear people say, is this an action movie or is it a comedy? The answer is yes. There has never been anything like this before, and that makes marketing people a little nervous."

Space Truckers

VISUAL FX

British CGI company leaps to the big screen.

British CGI company Electric Image, building on its 13-year reputation for commercial advertising and broadcast work, takes a leap into the feature arena with SPACE TRUCKERS. The assignment came about because the company's digital effects supervisor Paul Docherty had a working relationship with the film's special effects supervisor Brian Johnson (Academy Award winner for ALIEN and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK). Docherty said, "When Brian landed the assignment, there came the opportunity for us to quote on it. We looked at it from every angle and realized it was unique in that it involved a certain amount of original 3-D work plus a lot of composites like blue-/green-screen effects, lasers, people being blasted, morphed and melted. Our proposal also included a communications system between ourselves and Ireland. So we were able to answer problems in terms of the kind of work we'd done before but also with the right kind of communication between all factions."

Originally, director Stuart Gordon wanted as many of the effects done in-camera as possible. But, Docherty noted, "The reasons for moving into the digital area are because the advanced technology can solve a lot more problems than ever before. The level of detail and believability is much greater as the software improves on a month-by-month basis. The argument that digitals have a cartoon look is receding as the technology inexorably moves towards a greater realism. Now you can allow an image to spend a longer time on screen without sophisticated audiences 'spotting the wires' so to speak. Most directors, especially those with no special effects knowledge, are turning towards digitals because it's fast becoming the best way to help them tell their story."

Electric Image's main task was to build the pirate spaceship, *Regalia*. "The *Regalia* lurks in this scummy sea of asteroids waiting to prey on anything that comes near it, like the pirates of old," explained Docherty. "The *Regalia*

Special effects crew Faisal Karim, Paul Gentry and Steve Switaj pose before a blue-screen setup of the miniature of the Transgen moonbase.



One of Electric Image's effects shots.

crew—led by the bionic Captain Macanudo [Charles Dance]—take over another craft, dismantle it, and reform it into something else. The visual reference point for us was the James Bond movie where the front of a boat opens to scoop up its prey. Halfway through, the story, trucker John Canyon [Dennis Hopper] and his pachyderm rig are captured by the *Regalia* because they are escaping from the TransGen company with an unusual cargo connected to Macanudo."

Simon Haddocks, head of animation at Electric Image, came up with the design of the *Regalia*: "Basically, what I did was raid all the fantasy film magazines in specialist shops—your own included—took out those old STAR WARS books and made a whole portfolio of designs, 'Let's take a bit of this, a bit of that—I like this detail'—and that's how we got there. It's Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* with an even more Gothic feel.

"Scale was a bit of a worry," Haddocks continued. "The *Regalia* had to look like a huge spaceship—one of those colossal mile-long numbers that soars over the audience's heads. That meant we had to have smaller windows. You do tend to sit at your workstation for weeks on end adding detail and embellishing on textures. It had to look un-computery. The good thing about the ship is it really does look better on film—it's slightly more contrasty in that medium. I like the fact that it looks like a vast bit of Victorian ironwork. That was an accident be-



John Canyon's interplanetary rig blasts through flaming debris. This is Electric Image's first feature film work, after years of British television commercials.

cause of the old pirate feel we went for. For example, we've given the windows a yellowish glow rather than a white one to suggest the possibility of oil lamps lighting the interiors. There's also this big skull design on the side, should anyone be in any doubt as to what craft it is. It's also docked in a belt of dark shiny asteroids. That, more than anything else, made us decide to go the digital route as black shiny asteroids are impossible to build as models whereas computers can do it relatively easily."

If any one image influenced the design of the *Regalia* the most, it was the *Nostromo* ship in *ALIEN*, admitted Haddocks. He said, "It's hard to imagine building something like that on the computer because there is just so much detail on that model. To be perfectly honest, there is only just enough detail on the *Regalia*. There's only one machine at Electric Image that can render the whole spaceship at once—and we need 400 megabytes of on-line RAM just to do that. To render close-ups of it takes 30 minutes a frame. If you take models from past space epics, it's the stuff with all the barnacles that's most fun. But we can't simply stick more model kit pieces on the side. Modelmakers can add detail without penalty; the computer animator can't. We always have to think in terms of how hard it is to render, but machines do double their speed every 18 months or so. A year ago we couldn't have done this job. In a year's time we could have done it far faster."

In all, Electric Image's 15 strong team had 100 different shots to accomplish. Because of this workload, Electric Image upgraded its Onyx multiprocessor super computer and brought in Descreet Logic 'Inferno' to add to the existing complement of high-end Silicon Graphics work stations running Wavefront 'Explore' software. Docherty said, "We decided to upgrade to 'Inferno' because of the higher resolutions and quality levels a feature film requires and because it is the best at providing us with a high-level multi-layer compositing system that not only runs in real time but also operates at resolutions for just about any large screen format."

SPACE TRUCKERS finished principal shooting in October, 1995, with seven months allotted to complete the special effects. To make things easier, the film was extensively storyboarded. Docherty said, "That way things could be prepared and started whilst the live action shoot was going on. We had enough skilled people to pre-plan every shot—so much so, in fact, we've had hardly any contact with Stuart Gordon—we've dealt solely with Brian Johnson and the other special effects supervisor, Paul Gentry. The problem with working on most feature films is that decisions are left to the last minute. We evened that process out greatly because we were so well prepared."

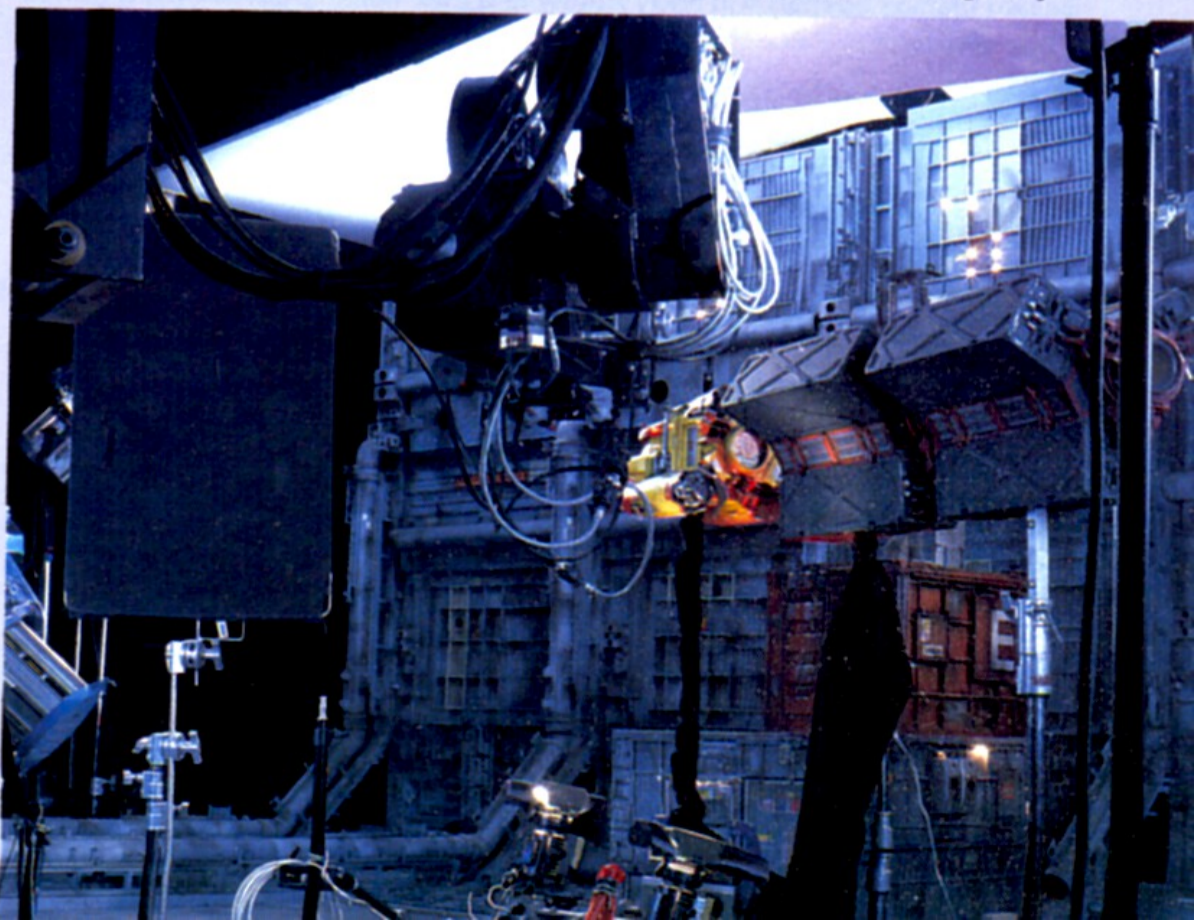
Both Docherty and Haddocks were watchful about not getting carried away by the latest technology. Haddocks remarked, "We are

all still fascinated by the digital technology to a large degree, and the danger is to overdo it. As long as the *Regalia* looks authentic, though, I'll be happy. We met the guys in the Dublin model shop recently, and they said how relieved they were about not building the spaceship because of the mechanics involved. There's a revolving centrifuge in the ship which would be a nightmare to create as a mechanical model, whereas it's a relatively simple process for us."

Docherty continued, "The basic difference between computer work and miniature work is that we can build a model layer by layer to a very high degree of detail which can be seen pretty well at any angle necessary with com-

plete control over lighting and texture. Traditionally, the miniature shop would have to build a series of different models for each shot, rig them separately, and then shoot them. What we've learned on our side is that in producing the *Regalia* as a computer model it's very close to what it would take if you were doing it as a miniature, but the shooting is obviously easier than motion control. I feel we've used digital technology appropriately in *SPACE TRUCKERS*. It's taking its place in the special effects canon as another tool to be used in completing the whole. And you still have to have artists at the work stations to give the technology the imaginative edge it needs." **Alan Jones**

A miniature setup of the pachyderm, Canyon's space truck, in the cargo bay.



CRONE

The most audacious

By Paul Wardle

The release of a new film by David Cronenberg is always certain to be accompanied by widely divergent opinions from critics and viewers alike. Cronenberg has often been vilified for making disturbing or violent films, even by those who have no problem with the senseless carnage in the average slasher flick. Cronenberg's films tend to affect viewers on a much deeper level. It has been said that he is actually making the same film over and over again, but a more poignant explanation might be that, despite the changes in characters, settings and plotlines, each film is consistent with his artistic vision, one that chooses to depict biological horror or the human elements of science fiction, and that his approach to filmmaking hits too close to home for some people.

Cronenberg's latest work is an adaptation of the bizarre J.G. Ballard novel, *CRASH*. It's one of the most controversial and talked-about films of 1996, polarizing people into either loving or hating it. It was given a special award for "audacity" at the Cannes Film Festival, and in July it opened to great critical and boxoffice success in France. In October, its Canadian release was also successful, though the advertisements were curiously worded: "Love it, Hate it, See it"—which demonstrates the difficulty Alliance Releasing (the Canadian distributor) faced in deciding how to market the film.


Like many of David Cronenberg's films, *CRASH* is about obsession and the way in which it makes those who succumb to it outcasts from society, though not necessarily disliking that status. "They've all experi-

enced car crashes," the writer/director is quoted in the official press release, "which have somehow unleashed a kind of erotic imagery that surprises them. They try, each in their own way, to incorporate that into their lives."


The lead character is named after Ballard himself. He and his wife (played by James Spader and Deborah Unger) are jaded, emotionally bankrupt people who have an open marriage and try a variety of sexual deviations to regain some spark in their relationship. Their budding interest in automobiles as sex toys is intensified after Ballard experience an auto accident. Gradually, the viewer is introduced to a secret society of car fetishists, whose ringleader, Vaughan (Elias Koteas), is a sociopathic bisexual who stages famous celebrity crashes for the entertainment of like-minded individuals. Intense performances by Holly Hunter and Rosanna Arquette flesh-out the cast and add fascinating subtext to the barrenness created by the lead characters. Arquette's character is particularly enticing: a woman whose obsession with having sex in moving vehicles has resulted in serious injury. Despite this, she seems deliriously happy with her affliction, wearing her disability like a badge of honor. Her legs are splinted in a complex series of leg braces combined with leather clothing to form an interesting variation of bondage gear.

One comment heard from a viewer after a screening was that there was no story. They should have read the book—Cronenberg's adaptation has far more coherence and is one instance when the film improves on the book.

At his office in Toronto, the



Despite the lack of futuristic technology, *CRASH* can be considered science fiction because of the "psychology of the people," said Cronenberg. Above: Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) contemplates future collisions. Below: James Ballard (James Spader) and Holly Hunter find their libido aroused after a wreck.



CRONENBERG'S "CRASH"

picture of 1996 finally comes out in 1997.

director pointed out that, despite the lack of splashy special effects in *CRASH* (as opposed to *THE FLY* or *VIDEODROME*), making a film which consists mainly of sex scenes and car crashes presents unique problems of its own. "It's a strange position to be in," said Cronenberg. "You have the logistics of an action movie to deal with, but it's not an action movie. So you have to take all the energy and pains that an action movie demands, but you don't really score points for that. So some days, I had, for example, 35 stunt drivers and 35 stunt cars on a road that we completely blocked off, and we were shooting in the rain, and having to choreograph that as any stunt, but telling the stunt guys, 'No, I don't want the triple roll with the explosion.' What's interesting is the way people have had their reality redefined by Hollywood. I had one guy say to me that the car crashes weren't realistic. I asked him what he meant, and he said, 'There's none of that slow motion stuff and the shots where you see it from five different angles...and there were no explosions.' So I asked him if he had ever been in a car accident himself, and he said, 'No.' I laughed, because to him, what he described is real. I was trying to make [the accidents] realistic, but I was more interested in the aftermath than the crashes themselves. Nevertheless, even though I was focusing more on the psychology behind the events, we still had to do all that sophisticated stuff. For instance, in the first crash that Ballard is involved in, we used a robot car, like a little dirt [toy] car, but this was a full-sized one controlled by a radio remote controller. This is state of the art when it comes to filming crashes. It was developed by a Cana-

"A lot of filmmaking these days is very superficial...even when it purports to take a moral stand, everybody knows that no one involved really cares about the moral part."



James Spader and Deborah Unger play the bored married couple, looking for new sexual kicks, who encounter a cult who find eroticism in auto accidents.

dian company. It hasn't been used very much yet, but it's quite amazing. You can stand on a hill and drive a real car down below just using this little remote control with an antenna."

Cronenberg continued, "There is a lot of special effects makeup in the movie, but it is very subtle, very realistic—stuff people probably don't even notice, like Elias Koteas with scars on his face all the time. That's very difficult to do, because it's a moving face that you cannot specifically light only for the effects. He's got to be free to do whatever a person does and not worry about smiling too much because it's going to crinkle the scar. It's a difficult special effect that you don't score too many

points with, but has to be right or everybody will see it. Obviously, the audience that comes to see *CRASH* is not an effects-oriented audience, so something like Rosanna Arquette's leg wound was a little bit more spectacular. However, for a horror film audience that would be no big deal. The context would be, though, because I don't think even that audience has seen a scene like that before. But it's very strange how Hollywood has changed people's perceptions of what is realistic."

Even stranger is the way people try to categorize and label Cronenberg films. Because *NAKED LUNCH*, *M. BUTTERFLY*, *DEAD RINGERS*, and *CRASH*—unlike his earlier

work—cannot easily be pigeonholed as horror or science fiction, some critics and fans have been speculating that the director is distancing himself from those genres. "Not at all," Cronenberg replied. "I don't think in those terms. For me, that's just a marketing problem. Do you market this as a horror film, a science fiction film, or what? For example, *NAKED LUNCH*: huge effects, creatures—you name it, we had it. But you wouldn't really call it a horror film; you wouldn't call it a sci-fi film. And I don't care," he laughed. "It's not relevant. The creative process does not work in term of categories. Not for me anyway, and not for most people, I think. No, I still have great love and affection for both genres. I have a big Philip K. Dick collection."

Similarly, he dispels another myth about his recent work: that he has stopped filming his own stories and has instead become more interested in adapting the works of other writers. "I have written two original scripts at the moment and been contracted to write a third. The third one is *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE*." Aficionados will recognize this as the title of a low-budget film Cronenberg directed in 1970. He is reusing only the title and the concept, but it is not an actual remake of the original, which is included on the laser disc of *DEAD RINGERS*. "*CRIMES OF THE FUTURE* will definitely be sci-fi," said Cronenberg. "Another script I've written called *EXISTENZ* is also sci-fi, and the other one, *RED CARS*, is about auto racing."

While audiences await his next original film, *CRASH* has finally been scheduled for March 21, 1997. The delay can be blamed on Ted Turner, who



Catherine Ballard (Deborah Unger) and James Ballard (James Spader) in the aftermath of an intentional automobile crash.

was widely quoted as saying he found the film disgusting and, for a time, tried to block its release by Fineline Features, which was a subsidiary of the corporation he recently sold to Time-Warner. Many people have speculated that Turner's trepidation about releasing the film was due to worry about his public image as a producer of family entertainment, especially with the Time-Warner deal imminent.

Cronenberg claims there will be no more interference from the entertainment mogul, but what does he think about Turner's very public attack on the film and his efforts to block its release? Cronenberg is refreshingly candid on this subject. "Someone showed me an article that discussed Turner's early life. He was racing yachts with his first wife one time. She was racing against him, and was several months pregnant, and because she was winning, he crashed his yacht into her. He couldn't bear to be beaten by a woman. As a child he was abused by his father, not sexually, but he was beaten, and he freaked out when he saw *BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA*, which deals with child abuse. One might ask if he's really reacting to his own life and it's hitting too close to home." Cronenberg won't speculate what it is in *CRASH* that might be af-

fecting Turner on the same level, but he clearly feels there is more to Turner's reaction than a man genuinely interested in preserving decency.

The sex scenes have offended many conservative viewers besides Turner, but Cronenberg had no problem with the cast members' acceptance of the material. "That was one of the things we discussed the least: the sex scenes," he said. "The problem with the scene[s] is: how do you choreograph it, how do you make it work, how do you say the dialogue so that it works the best? Those [considerations] are normal for any scene. The actors were totally on board. When you read the script, you certainly know on what level the movie is. There was no question. When Holly [Hunter] came out to do the scene with Spader in the car, she had no underpants on. She was naked from the waist down. I didn't tell her 'no underpants'; she [decided that on her own]. Likewise with the other actors. That was part of the heart of the film. If there had been a problem, they would have just not done the movie."

Cronenberg added that a couple of actors who were approached before James Spader were "completely repulsed by the entire project." He chose not to name the actors, but

added that they were very well known. Cronenberg is not going to waste time in production trying to convince performers to take their clothes off, something which would be, in his own words, "a nightmare," and ultimately "ludicrous and demeaning to the entire project."

Since the film was released in Canada, many people have commented that the Ballard book was a perfect choice for Cronenberg, and has a connection to the type of vision his films always exhibit. It should come as a surprise to many that Cronenberg was neither a Ballard fan, nor did he have a fondness for *CRASH* when he first read it.

"It was sent to me by a journalist," he recalled. "I only read half of it and didn't read the rest until six months later. Even after that, I didn't relate to it. Many people have said that the connection is obvious between this and my other work, but after the fact, everything is obvious. I still haven't read his earlier sci-fi work. Mostly I've read all the stuff he's written since he wrote *CRASH*. I don't read books looking for material [to film]. Then it was a couple of years later that I was talking to Jeremy Thomas when we were

making *NAKED LUNCH*, and he asked me if there was anything I was desperate to do, that we could work on together, and I said, 'I think we should do *CRASH*.' Well, he went crazy. He said he optioned the book when it came out; he couldn't get it made; he knew Ballard, and he could introduce me. Meanwhile, I'm saying to myself, 'Why did I say that?' I was sure I wasn't interested, but—those are very honest moments and very revealing. The book was obviously [on my mind] percolating away under the surface, and it had begun some kind of process in me which I obviously needed to make the movie to complete. We never looked back."

He was quick to point out, though, that the book as written by Ballard wouldn't seem as connected to his vision as the finished film does. Despite this, he was pleased that Ballard loved the movie, even joining him on stage at the Cannes Film Festival, and has been vocal in his praise of Cronenberg's adaptation of his story. "But it is different from the book, and he knew it would be," said Cronenberg, "and that delighted him. He's that kind of person. He was excited to see his work filtered through my sensibility. Whenever you see someone try to become the other person, it

never works. It's always flawed and wooden and stiff.

"A lot of people still think of CRASH as a sci-fi book," the director continued, "and it's not just the momentum from his earlier work. It's also the psychology of the people. It's not a normal psychology, but it's presented as normal for the characters. Ballard has even said that the film goes beyond the book. He meant it in terms of the psychology—that the movie begins where the book ends. That psychology is accepted by the movie as the norm."

The subject of censorship inevitably arises when discussing a film like this. Was a different cut of the film made for European distribution and have any concessions been made for North American censors? Cronenberg's views on censorship are well known, and nothing has been edited out since he cut the film to his satisfaction.

"If you self-censor, you're pretty well doomed," he said. "It's impossible to let the censors inside your door but keep them only in the vestibule. They will swarm all over your house," he chuckled. "You have to forget them. We were in a completely hermetically sealed environment when we were making this movie, and the only dynamics that were considered by all of us, in terms of sex, violence or anything else, was how it worked within the film. And I've tried to be very true to that. Some people looked at THE DEAD ZONE and said, 'It's more mainstream; it's not so violent; it's not so dependent on effects,' and all this nonsense. Then I made THE FLY, which was very violent, very sexual, and very dependent on effects. It's only because THE DEAD ZONE had that melancholy tone. You could feel when you were going too far one way or the other. To be sexually explicit in that movie was wrong. It just didn't work and it had nothing to do with worrying about censors."

The film won several Genie awards (the Canadian equivalent of the Oscars), including one for best director, of which Cronenberg is justly proud, considering that his early films were not that highly regarded by the Canadian film industry. Even at Cannes,

“A lot of people think of CRASH as sci-fi,” said Cronenberg. “It’s the psychology of the characters. It’s not a normal psychology, but it’s presented as normal.”



Elias Koteas plays Vaughan, charismatic guru of the automobile-crashing cult.

there were two out of the ten members who did not vote for CRASH, but Francis Ford Coppola was not among them, contrary to what the Canadian press reported at the time. The film has been well-received by open-minded people everywhere it has played. Though there wasn't much competition at the theatres when CRASH opened in Canada, Cronenberg insists its success had nothing to do with loyalty to him as a Canadian. "I wish!" he joked. "M. BUTTERFLY flopped and NAKED LUNCH wasn't as strong. Certainly there are a core of fans who are interested in my work, but on the scale that you need to release a picture, that's not enough."

As reported earlier, the Canadian advertising for CRASH was strange. Even negative reviews were quoted in the ads, something rather unusual. And one reviewer, who stated that she didn't like the film, still urged people to see it, practically an unprecedented occurrence. Cronenberg was flattered, but had his own explanation for this odd turn of events. "I believe that a lot of people simply did not have the [mental] equipment

to know how to react, and I mean critics as well. It was hitting them at such an oblique and strange angle that they couldn't decipher their own reactions which is why you get these strange anomalies. Even for that reason people should see the movie! How many movies do that?"

Of all the countries that have considered the film, perhaps the strangest response has been from England. "First of all," Cronenberg explained, "the British Board Of Film Classification has not given the film a certificate or refused it one. It hasn't made its ruling. I know from talking to the censor himself that it will not be banned. However, the English are so insane and their newspapers are so insane, and their politics are so crazed right now, because for the first time in 17 years, Tories are behind in the polls. There's an election coming up, and every one feels the Labour Party will win, and they're desperate for anything to cling to. Now, here comes this movie that they can try to ban to show how tough they can be. They're completely obsessed with control. No one is

talking freedom of expression. To say freedom is like political suicide. Even the Labour Party is saying, 'No, we'll ban CRASH sooner!' Every week there's something like a kid stabbing a schoolmaster. They want to bring back caning of children in the schools. They're really nuts! They have a weird island mentality there, fear of contamination from the outside world. People came up to me and told me I was right. It's like a confession they're making. I know the censor wants to pass the film uncut, but it's a political situation. He's afraid he'll lose his job; he's afraid that the government will take over censorship just as an excuse. At the moment, the censor board is not a government-controlled thing. There's an obscure legal structure there where local councils of boroughs can decide to do an interim ban. So Westminster Council did an interim ban pending the outcome of the censor board's decision. The Westminster Council controls the west end of London where all the good cinemas are and all the tourists go. However, a) it would not mean it would be banned anywhere else; b) it would only be an interim ban; and c) they're banning a movie that can't be released anyway because it hasn't got a certificate yet, so no one could see it anyway. What's interesting is that they're pretending that it's a violent film. They're still repressed there, and they can't deal with the sex, so they talk about it as violence. They're comparing it to NATURAL BORN KILLERS, which I think is misleading, and here's the point where publicity turns bad. People will tell you there's no such thing as bad publicity, but I don't agree, because you get the wrong people coming to see the movie—they're disappointed, because it's not what they think, and then the people who would like it don't go. I actually had a guy say that he was cringing through the first three quarters of it, waiting for this ultra-violence that he had been told about; it doesn't happen, but by that time, he had sort of missed the movie. Now he says he's going to have to see it again *if he can.*"

In fact Cronenberg's adaptation of what was a very grisly book, is quite tasteful and not at all excessive in its depictions of the crash victims or the carnage of the collisions, whereas Ballard's novel positively wallowed in page after page of gory descriptions. What could easily have become a gore-fest in the hands of a lesser director is not exploitative, despite the distortions of truth by the British government and Ted Turner. "The real violence of the movie is conceptual violence," said Cronenberg. "It's the idea of what the characters are doing and thinking that disturbs people. Just as when they come out of the theatre, they're conscious of the fragility they have when driving through traffic that they've numbed themselves to. Then there was all this worry about copycat crimes. What? Teenagers will have sex in cars? That *never* happens. Also, the people in the movie are not kids. They're mature adults."

The film was independently financed, yet the original backers—three Frenchmen, whose organization, U.G.C. was originally supposed to finance *CRASH*—backed out when they read the script. It was a decision they would live to regret, when they saw *CRASH*'s success at Cannes. Their refusal "really surprised" Cronenberg, who, along with Ballard, is held in high esteem in France. Upon seeing the finished film, they told him, "We've made a mistake." The only involvement with the Hollywood machine was Fineline, who were involved solely for the U.S. distribution. "They don't pay you money until you hand them the film," Cronenberg added, "and anything can happen until that moment."

None of these battles over censorship or acceptance are anything new to Cronenberg. Over the years, many of his films have elicited negative reactions from even respected critics and a large number of intelligent filmgoers. Why does his work provoke such responses? "Because the films are serious," he opined. "Who is going to have a really negative reaction to *INDEPENDENCE DAY*? It's not worth a negative

Arquette's character is particularly enticing—her obsession with sex in vehicles has resulted in serious injury. Still, she seems deliriously happy with her affliction.



Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) is one of the auto-eroticists.

reaction. It doesn't call forth emotions one way or another. It's not meant to. A lot of filmmaking these days is very superficial. It's safe. It's not meant to get anyone too riled up, and even when it purports to take a moral stance, everybody knows that no one involved in the movie really cares about the moral part of it. A moral stance in Hollywood films is often just part of the narrative. It's a character attribute. This guy stands up for justice. It's not like the filmmakers were worrying about that. They made the character have a strong point of view so he can struggle with someone, conflict being the essence of drama. You look at *STRANGE DAYS*. I was *really* surprised to see it starting to become a movie about a race war, and not really being a sci-fi movie at all. Yet they didn't have the guts to complete that. The movie ends with a 38-second race riot that is immediately

calmed, with no repercussion or aftermath. Either you leave it out or you do it. Sadly, it was just a plot device. You feel that the filmmakers did not care.

"I do not consider myself a political filmmaker in the sense of making a film about social concerns like racism," Cronenberg continued, "but in the politics of human existence, I'm very passionately committed. That, to me, is what it is about *CRASH* that generates such a passionate response. I think it's responding to my own passion; and obviously, because it's not easy stuff, some of it's going to be negative. Some Italian journalists accused it of being a pornographic film, but I actually found that to be more of a structural problem. They hadn't seen a movie that would start with three sex scenes in a row and had sequential sex scenes, except for porn films. But as I would say to them if I had a chance, it would be a

very bad porn film, because it does not satisfy all those things that you would want from a porn film. If I were going to make a porn film, it would not be like *CRASH*, but structurally, it has some of the elements of a porn film, rather than the content."

Clearly, a key element of the book and the movie is this secret society of fetishists. This is a theme often repeated in Cronenberg's work. The lead character is usually an outcast from society, either because he has telepathic powers (*THE DEAD ZONE*, *SCANNERS*), a mutated, disfigured appearance (*THE FLY*) or a deep, dark secret (*VIDEODROME*, *DEAD RINGERS*). The question then follows, whether this is a psychological extension of Cronenberg's own feeling of isolation from the outside world. He was a fan of 1950's E.C. horror and science fiction comics, which was a good starting point for his later career, but other than that, he denies having anything but a normal, middle-class childhood.

"I've never thought of myself as an outcast," he said. "I have a very good, supportive family. I grew up on a street where everybody looked after everybody else's kids; everybody was in and out of each other's houses. Too normal, I suppose, to really feel like an outcast with a capital 'O'. On the other hand, I read a lot, which a lot of kids didn't do; I collected butterflies; I had a girlfriend when I was five. Everybody else was playing football and I was over at my girlfriend's place, acting out little dramas, so I felt different in a sense from the 'normal' kid, but there were enough other kids like me that from that point of view I didn't feel isolated."

Though not as repressive or conservative as the 1980s, the 1990s have been a volatile decade, and the situation Cronenberg described in England—a country where even the government-owned BBC-TV once broadcast a show like *MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS*—is rapidly changing. Changes are being enacted to take away the artistic freedom that British television has always taken for granted. Ac-



"It's a strange position to be in," said Cronenberg. "You have the logistics of an action movie, but you don't really score points for that."

According to Cronenberg, the new legislation, if it takes root, will eliminate, among other things, anything "disturbing." With this in mind, does Cronenberg think the climate of the '90s is becoming more repressive or more liberal?

"I think it's cyclical," he responded. "It's obvious that we have been in periods where freedom was more valued and that this is a period where fear is more in control. Censorship is not about morality; it's about fear and control. Whether that will continue for the next three years of the 1990s, I wouldn't even want to guess. I'm willing to be surprised. The cycles have been and can be quite short."

If movies, books, comics, or television could really be responsible for turning people to assault, murder, rape, or other violent activities, then wouldn't the censors, who are exposed to these materials day in and day out, be the ones most likely to commit these crimes? Cronenberg agrees: "It's not a simple mechanistic understanding of these things that will lead people to copy them. People want to believe (as someone put it) that to portray it is to endorse it. If that were true, that would mean that all subtlety in art is

impossible, all satire is impossible, all humor is impossible. The idea that people will just do what is up on the screen is ludicrous. By that argument, you could also make a case for suppressing all news, because when someone like Jeffrey Dahmer gets famous, that's enough of a motivation for some people who are desperate to have their 15 minutes of fame. I had to get this blunt for England: it doesn't really matter if a guy walks into a theatre showing *NATURAL BORN KILLERS* saying, 'When I leave this theatre, I'm going to shoot five people, but I want to see this movie first.' Then, when he comes out, he says, 'You know, I think I'll stab those five people instead, because it was so neat in the movie when they stabbed people.' That's not even the issue. The issue is: can someone go into a theatre not being a killer and come out of the theatre a killer. If you could prove *that*, it would be pretty devastating. I absolutely don't believe it's possible, and I don't think it's ever happened. Therefore, that's not the issue. If someone is on the verge of killing, then anything can trigger them off, whether it's a pair of high-heeled shoes in a window, or "Helter

Skelter," the Beatles song. Are you going to ban all Beatles songs because there might be another Charles Manson out there?"

Specifically regarding the point about the censors being exposed to the same material, Cronenberg had this to say: "You know what one person said to me here [about that]? 'Oh, well, we rotate the people. We don't all see them all.' What do you do when you're dealing with a mentality like that? At basis, censorship is very condescending and patronizing. You're basically saying, 'I am educated enough and poised enough and mature enough and stable enough, but there are people out there who are not. And I don't want them to get crazed and kill me.' That's what's really there, and in England it's so obvious. All that formal colonial energy is now turned inward. The people they're afraid of are now *on* the island. It's a racist thing; it's a class thing. All of these things indicate that England hasn't really changed that much in a couple hundred years."

Cronenberg has chosen to stay in Toronto, while many of his contemporaries have had their greatest success after leaving Canada and going to Holly-

wood, London, or New York. Perhaps because of this, he has remained close to the influences that made his early films so unique. He describes his decision thusly: "Everybody shoots in Toronto. They're shooting a movie called *MIMIC* with Mira Sorvino. Other directors shoot here using Carol Spier and my crew. They're not all Canadian productions, obviously, but I think the industry is very healthy. If people are coming here to shoot, why would I go away? It doesn't make sense. My moment where I might have moved to the States passed very early in my life. I must say, it's very sweet to have a lot of young filmmakers tell me I inspired them—not only my work, but the fact that I've stayed here. It just proves that you can establish an international reputation at home. So, if I've done nothing else, I've done that, and that's some thing."

Yet he *has* done more. He has made films, regardless of their subject matter or viewpoint, that are artistic, that have integrity, and that stay in our minds for years to come. With the glut of anonymous, big-budget films that permeate the industry, that, too, is no small feat. □

DAVID LYNCH

ON LOST HIGHWAY

A surreal meditation on love, jealousy, identity & reality.

*By Frederick Szebin
and Steve Biodrowski*

David Lynch. The name is synonymous to film-goers around the world with the cinema of the abstract, the surreal, and the obtuse. The director of ERASERHEAD, DUNE, and BLUE VELVET, offers his first feature since TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME. This latest work, LOST HIGHWAY, is a dual-storied (or is it the same story?), noirish tale of lust and murder.

Or is it?

Lynch co-wrote the script with Barry Gifford, whose novel *Wild at Heart*, provided the basis for the director's 1990 motion picture. Bill Pullman (INDEPENDENCE DAY) stars with Patricia Arquette (ED WOOD), Balthazar Getty (MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS), Robert Loggia (INDEPENDENCE DAY), Robert Blake (IN COLD BLOOD), Gary Busey (SILVER BULLET), and Richard Pryor (STIR CRAZY). The film received a limited release in February, with a nationwide release in March.

LOST HIGHWAY follows

Above: The Mystery Man's burning cabin, of conflicting but inter-related reality in LOST HIGHWAY. Significant (or insignificant) to the film's narrative.



Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) performs, tormented with the question of why his wife isn't in the audience. His suspicion sets the stage for dark consequences.





Often glimpsed in reverse slow-motion, seems to indicate the transition between two levels of *LOST HIGHWAY*, the new film from director David Lynch. Below: the Lost Highway Hotel is about as narrative as the titular locale in *CHINATOWN*—it's more a state of mind than an actual place.



WIDE OPEN HIGHWAY

“It doesn’t do any good to say, ‘This is what it means,’” said Lynch. **“When you are spoon-fed a film, people instantly know what it is. I like films that leave room to dream.”**

Fred Madison (Pullman), a jazz musician convicted of murdering his wife, Renee (Arquette). But this plot mutates (along with its protagonist) into the story of Pete Dayton (Getty), a young mechanic who may or may not be another version of Fred, who carries on a dangerous liaison with the mistress of a gangster (also played by Arquette who). This all takes place in an imaginary Los Angeles that seems to have emerged from a parallel universe, and is overseen by the Mystery Man (Blake), a ghostly figure who may (or may not) have supernatural powers. Film noir, German Expressionism, and French New Wave meld to create a story that may never have happened, could be a dream, or a representation of madness.

If you expect the film’s ultimate meaning to be defined by its director and co-writer, you’d be sorely disappointed. While talking about his latest film, Lynch prefers to be vague about its meanings, choosing to emphasize the effectiveness of

cinema as an art form, rather than commenting on the meaning of his own work.

“I had been thinking about identity,” he said. “This came up in my discussions with Barry Gifford and is one of the things *LOST HIGHWAY* is about.” Which is as concrete as the director is likely to be.

This is the first time Gifford and Lynch collaborated on a script face to face (Lynch adapted *WILD AT HEART* on his own). “It was great,” Lynch says of actually writing with Gifford. “Everybody is different. When you have Person A writing with Person F, it goes a certain way. And if Person A writes with Person G, it goes another way. The interaction is based on the individuals in their room, and the process is interesting. I trust Barry’s instincts. We like similar things and had a great time.”

For a film steeped in technique and style, its origins were surprisingly low-tech. Gifford, who does not use a word processor, said he “would just write on long, yellow legal

Bill and Candace Dayton (Gary Busey and Lucy Butler) are part of the film’s second story, when Fred Madison turns into a new character, Pete Dayton.



LOST HIGHWAY

Mystery Man

Robert Blake makes your blood run cold, again.

By Steve Biodrowski

Robert Blake has made a career out of playing realistic, believable characters, whom audiences see as regular, ordinary people—whether a poor young boy in *THE TREASURE OF SIERRA MADRE* or a streetwise cop, *BARETTA*. In fact, in his most famous (and chilling) feature film performance, he portrayed a real person in Richard Brooks' adaptation of Truman Capote's non-fiction novel, *IN COLD BLOOD*. Therefore, it is a bit of a shock to find this actor suddenly playing not a regular Joe but a surreal character who may or may not exist only in the mind of a demented protagonist. His small but pivotal supporting performance in David Lynch's *LOST HIGHWAY* is one of the film's many highlights—almost as unnerving, in its own way, as his role in *IN COLD BLOOD*, though with a strange overlay of dark humor. Of course, the fact that the Mystery Man (as he is billed in the credits) doesn't exist makes him somewhat less frightening on a visceral level than a real-life psychopathic killer. But the unreal element adds its own layer—a sense of the uncanny, of dread all the more frightening because it is so unspecified and mysterious.

No one was more taken aback by this unusual bit of casting against type than Blake himself. "I was surprised David Lynch called me," said the actor. "I would have thought that he'd call Dennis Hopper or one of his guys. But he just said, 'Hey, I want you to play this.' I have no idea why! I read the script like nine fuckin' times, and I didn't understand one fuckin' word of it! I said,

'Are you sure you want me to play this? I'll be the most cooperative actor in the world, because I have no fuckin' opinion on anything of what the hell to do!' I made this mistake once of asking him what my character was, and I realized that he really is too much of an artist to be that specific about things. It was an extraordinary experience. He really is a rare commodity in America. In Europe and other places, you find film authors, or you find them in colleges or at Sundance, where somebody takes an 8mm, four dollars, and goes out and makes a movie.

But this guy does it as a professional and really makes the whole film, everything."

Blake found that his director was resistant to providing analytic explanations for his bizarre characters. "I don't think he knows!" exclaimed Blake. "He doesn't come from that place at all. As a matter of fact, when you work with him you have to be really ready to come to him as a child. You work with Sidney Pollack or Mark Rydell, and they want the spine of the character and the subtext, the conflict, the psycho-neurotic mumbo-jumbo, and all of that. David Lynch

[doesn't]—and I understand it now, because I found out that he was a painter, an artist. He really speaks an entirely different language. He's very creative, but he doesn't speak the normal cinema language. If you don't like him and trust him and get up off of your own shit, it can be a disaster, because he'll do things: you never find Martin Scorsese or Sidney Pollack walking up to you and saying, 'Okay, turn and look at me. Now tell me how you're going to say the line.' And I start to turn to the actor I'm working with, and Lynch says, 'No, no, no! Look at me! Say it to me!' Directors don't do that. They let you work off the other actor. He'd see me walking to my dressing room and say, 'Robert, how are you going to say that line?' And you just have to go there with him, or it will be a fucking nightmare."

Blake added that this approach was totally the opposite of what one learns in acting classes, about "working off the other artists, taking it from them. You never give an actor a line reading. You don't tell him to scratch his nose when he says this word. But David is like that, and you have to be loose enough and trusting enough of yourself to say, 'You know, I don't need all that other shit. I don't need that Method. I can do this. I can do this just the way a child could.' So then you're okay. Otherwise, he'll throw you all day long, because he doesn't do anything that directors, as such, do."

Blake refers to this process simply as "letting go." He was able to find a basis for this trust in his own early career, as a child actor. "I come from the 1930s, 1940s," he recalled. "I





Opposite page: Robert Blake, as the Mystery Man, appears to Fred Madison near the film's conclusion. Above: The ghostly figure intrudes into Pete Dayton's part of the story, conspiring with gangster Mr. Eddy (Robert Loggia, right).

grew up at MGM, and I worked with Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable, all those people. And I went to Warner Brothers, as a child, worked with Bogart, [John] Huston, and those people. Tracy said, 'The two most important things in acting are a child's imagination and a sense of truth.' That's what you have to bring to David. You have to get rid of all that acting technique, the classes, the books, and all that bullshit, and just bring him a child's imagination and a sense of truth, so that you can make true whatever it is that he wants you to do."

Blake found that verbal communication often didn't work with his director, who preferred visual modes. For example: "I said, 'David, I have some ideas about how this character should look.' He said, 'No, no, no! Just show me. Use your imagination.' And I said, 'Oh, yeah. That's what Tracy said.' I went off with the makeup people, and I got into this whole weird, fuckin' Kabuki-looking guy with ears [sticking out] and stuff. I was imagining in my own strange world those times I have seen things that weren't there, when a ghostly appearance occurred. I knew it was my imagination; I wasn't really seeing something. But I sort of knew what the Devil looked like; I knew what Fate looked like. I used to have this image of myself that would come to me sometimes. I'd go out to the desert and get

involved in some strange, isolated kind of thing, and all of a sudden I would come to myself as this white, ghostly creature. I said, 'Oh yeah, that's my conscience talking to me.' So I started going with that. I cut my fuckin' hair off, and I put a crack in the middle of it and all this shit. And the makeup people said, 'You're going crazy, man! Nobody in this movie looks like that; everybody looks regular!' I said, 'Leave me alone; just give me some shit.' I put this black outfit on. I walked up to David, and he said, 'Wonderful!' and turned around and walked away. Now, you could never do that with a regular director, take a film where there's all these people who look absolutely normal and say, 'I'm going to go completely away and make an entirely different film. My film will be separate from Pullman's, Arquette's or anybody else's. I'm making a surrealistic, Oriental film!'—he laughs—"And I did! Imagine how strange his thinking must be to look at me looking all weird like that and [with] all these other straight-looking people, and say, 'Oh, yes. That'll work.' You'd never even think of doing that with Sidney Pollack. You wouldn't walk on his set like a Kabuki dancer. But Lynch just said, 'Use your imagination. How do you see this guy? What the hell is he?' Because I asked him what the guy was, and he didn't

answer me!"

Blake added that Lynch "immediately led me to believe that he didn't deal in those terms, any more than you would walk up to Salvadore Dali or Chagall and say, 'What do you mean in this painting?' 'What the fuck do you mean by "What do I mean"? I painted the painting; you get what you get out of it; I got what I got out of it.' I'm really convinced that Lynch is that way. You know better than to do that with a painter. Nobody goes up to a painter, especially an abstract painter—you don't ask Heronimus Bosch, 'What the fuck is that?' Because he would simply say, 'If you don't get it, I can't tell you. If it don't mean nothing to you, get the fuck out of here!' You can't go up to a great musician whose just finished an abstract impression of what the tune was and say, 'Now, what were you doing?' 'I was doing my thing.' David just does his thing."

Blake's Mystery Man (as he is called in the credits) is the first intrusion of the preternatural into what has up until that point been a fairly concrete, if somewhat mysterious, narrative. The question then was: how would the normal world react to this portentous, corporeal apparition? "The character does some surreal things," said Blake, "but I was very curious as to what David was going to do with the way I looked: how

continued on page 62

tablets, and an assistant would type it up. We're both very hard workers, and we concentrate well. We begin, and we just go through it and knock ourselves out."

Gifford calls Lynch's film of *WILD AT HEART* "a great big dark musical comedy. What David managed to keep was the focus, the tenderness between Sailor and Lula, the integrity; it also inspired him to go off into different directions."

Judging from those differences between the novel and the film, one might assume that *LOST HIGHWAY* fit a similar pattern, with Gifford supplying a basic, solid narrative, and Lynch inserting those identifiable Lynchian touches. Actually, both writers claim the collaboration was far more integral than that. According to Lynch, when one of them came up with an idea, it was instantly reshaped by the other person, then checked and rechecked by each other. One idea can have repercussions on what has come before, and all previous work had to be changed because of it. Lynch referred to the collaboration as "an unfolding, beautiful process."

Gifford concurred, saying, "I really wouldn't work with

Director David Lynch prefers to focus on the film's artistic merits, rather than its possible meanings.



LOST HIGHWAY

The Solution

Co-writer Barry Gifford deciphers Lynch's labyrinthine highway.

David Lynch has often been quoted describing ERASERHEAD as “a dream of dark and troubling things.” Since that 1978 debut, he has gone on to adapt his dream-like sensibility to far more accessible narrative structures. No matter how arresting the imagery is in THE ELEPHANT MAN and DUNE, and no matter how weird things get in BLUE VELVET or TWIN PEAKS, the audience basically knows who’s who and what’s happening. In WILD AT HEART, Lynch even took a story, from a novel by Barry Gifford, and managed to graft on surreal images without ever quite losing the thread of the main narrative, the “story of Sailor and Lula” (as the book is subtitled).

LOST HIGHWAY, co-written by Gifford, seems to take a similar approach—at first—with Robert Blake’s Mystery Man intruding upon the otherwise normal, if not altogether happy, life of Bill Pullman’s Fred Madison. But when Madison, imprisoned for the murder of his wife, Rene, metamorphoses into a new character (Balthazare Getty) and then meets Alice, a blonde doppelgänger of Rene (both played by Patricia Arquette), the story begins to spin beyond any kind of rational understanding on the part of viewers, who no longer know who’s who or what’s happening.

Lynch himself has no desire to enlighten viewers via interviews; he wants them to take their own meaning from what they see on screen. Gifford, on the other hand, is not so reluctant to discuss his intentions. So what is his explanation for the strange narrative?

The answer, of course, depends on the question, and the question that Lynch originally posed, as Gifford recalls, was: “What if one person woke up one day and was another person?” Gifford said, “We had to create a scenario to make that plausible. We discovered a clinical, psychological condition which fit our premise—a ‘psychogenic fugue.’ It’s as if you decided to change your life and showed up with a different name and entirely created a new identity for yourself and really grew to believe you were this new person. There are different kinds of fugue states, and a psychogenic fugue takes place only in your own mind—you don’t really go anywhere. It’s a mental fugue, for lack of a better term. This was something I researched with a clinical psychiatrist at Stanford, so we had some basis in

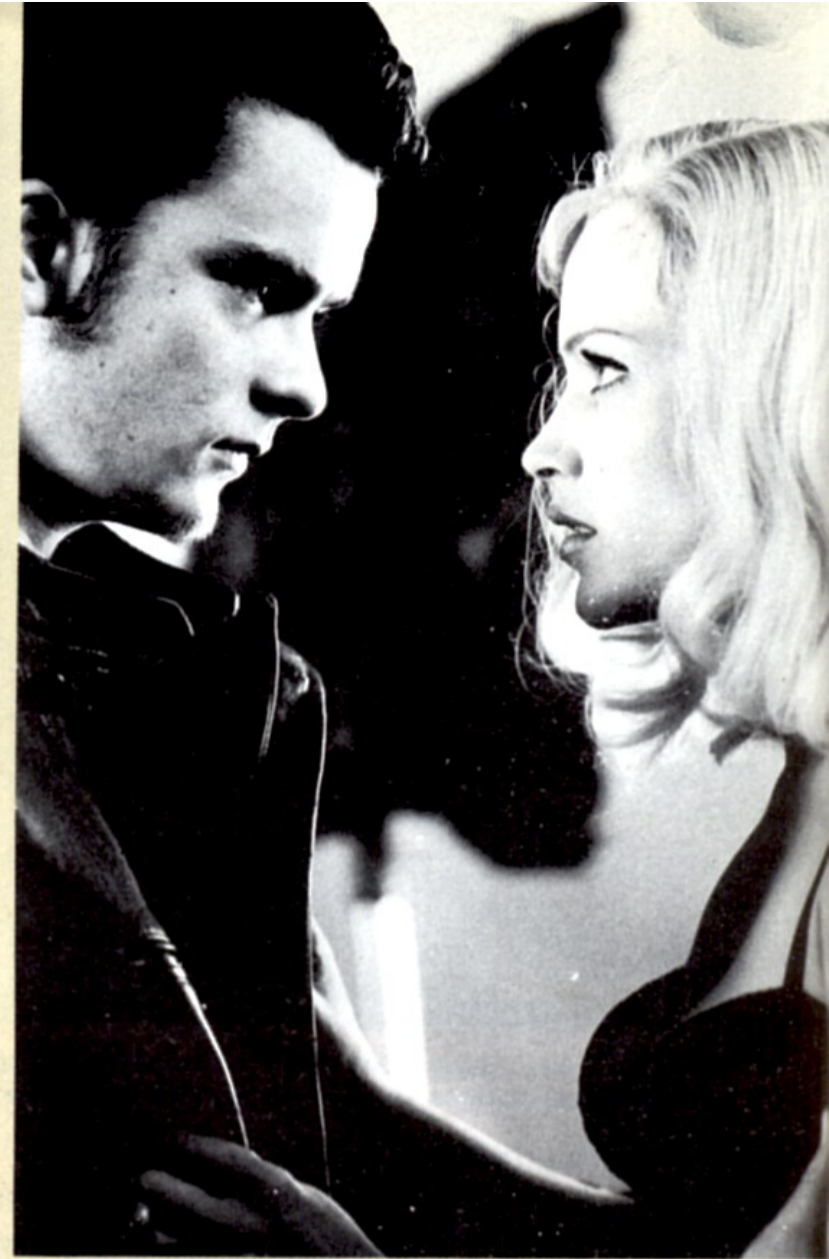
fact here. After we found that freedom, more or less it was just a matter of creating this surreal, fantastic world that Fred Madison lives in when he becomes Peter Dayton.”

The fugue is a kind of escape that Madison ultimately cannot maintain, because unpleasant reality keeps impinging on it. “The basic thing I can tell you is that Fred Madison creates this counter world and goes into it, because the crime he has committed is so terrible that he can’t face it,” Gifford added. “This fugue state allows him to create a fantasy world, but within this fantasy world, the same problems occur. In other words, he’s no better at maintaining this relationship, dealing with or controlling this woman, than he was in his real life. The woman isn’t who he thinks she is, really, so all the so-called facts of his known life with Rene pop up again in Alice Wakefield.”

In this interpretation, the appearance of the Mystery Man is the first hint of the psychotic break that Madison will eventually suffer. “He’s a product of Fred’s imagination, too,” said Gifford. “I think the phone call scene at the party is pretty interesting. A lot of work went into it. It’s supposed to be seamless; it’s supposed to look easy and sound normal. But there’s a lot that goes into writing this kind of thing. It’s the first visible manifestation of Fred’s madness. No one else can see the Mystery Man.”

So, has the mystery (not to mention the Mystery Man) been explained away? Well, the film *is* consistent with this reading; however, it does not go out of its way to tip audiences off to this interpretation. For example, there is no obvious stylistic shift when Madison enters the fantasy world of Pete Dayton; if anything, the narrative and visual are more concrete—at least until the alternate reality starts to break down again. “If you read the screenplay, it’s easier to see,” said Gifford. “I suppose you could have gone into black and white—just as if, on the page, we could have gone to different type, like italics.”

To grasp Gifford’s take on the story requires, perhaps, a second viewing. “I agree, because there’s so much menace the first time you see it,” said the writer. “I don’t know how you felt, and it’s hard for me or David to talk about it, because when you live with a thing for so long—and David had to go through the



The story of Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) and Alice Wakefield (Patricia Arquette) may be an escape by Fred Madison into a fantasy to avoid his guilt.

post-production on it, which is monumental in his films, because of the care he takes with the soundtrack and every element of it—it’s hard to be objective about it.”

After an initial test screening with a hand-picked, 50 person audience, 25 minutes were cut, bringing the running time down to 130 minutes. “Some people didn’t quite understand things at first, especially in the longer version,” said Gifford. “My youngest son, who’s 21, got it all—he’s amazing that way. Some people had some resistance, I think, just because they were trying to make sense out of it, but if you keep an open mind, the sense comes to you; you see what it is; and you can interpret it several ways.”

Despite its willful resistance toward offering easy answers, LOST HIGHWAY is never less than entertaining. For those unable to make sense out of it, the film resembles a bad dream about mysterious forces manipulating a hapless protagonist. “I think the fear of being out of control is a very real one that most people do have,” said Gifford. “Seeing a spirit or a presence or having—I don’t want to sound clinical—a psychotic episode, seeing the Mystery Man, whom nobody else can see, and having conversations with him—this is all really an element of losing control. It’s all right there, and it’s not often that you would see it on the screen, especially in this way. There have been other examples of this thing, but never close to being filmed in this way.”

Gifford concluded, “I think that LOST HIGHWAY is really reflective of the time. There’s a big revolution in terms of the demand on your brain; it looks like there’ll be no end to it—things are changing so fast it seems like you can’t keep up with it. I think, for us, it exists as a metaphor. I don’t want to presume to speak for David in that sense, but for me that’s how it feels.” **Steve Biodrowski**

anybody I don't respect. That doesn't mean you always love the result. But in this case, it's a challenge." That challenge consisted of trusting Lynch to visualize the outrageous ideas they were putting on paper. "There's a thing, where Michael Masee as Andy gets stuck on the table—that's so amazing the way David filmed it!" Gifford enthused. "We wrote it, thinking, 'If a guy launched himself at somebody like that, could his head get imbedded?' Remember how your mother told you to be careful around the corners of a glass table? We were taking that fantasy, like 'Don't play with that BB gun; you'll shoot your eye out.' It's the same kind of thing: what's the most horrific thing that could happen, and could it really happen? David said, 'Don't worry about it; just write it. I'll worry about how to make it happen.' Having complete confidence in him that way is very liberating."

As horrible as this particular image is, the precision of the execution renders it almost comic, in a strange way. "It's all just fantastic," said Gifford. "It's sort of beyond black humor. Because we had this freedom of being in a fantasy world, more or less, we could do anything. If spaceships came down, which they practically did, it wouldn't be out of context, given where we're at. That's a tremendous structure; I don't know if everyone understood it once we sprang it on them."

Indeed, many have been perplexed by *LOST HIGHWAY*. Gifford, however, insists that there is a completely rational explanation for the apparently surreal events on screen. [See sidebar] According to Gifford, Fred Madison is suffering a kind of psychological fugue, a condition in which a person creates another identity for himself. This is manifested in the film when Fred literally transforms into Pete, a younger character with his own identity and past history, for the film's second plot. This is far too much analysis for Lynch, who prefers to leave interpretation to viewers.

"Barry may have his idea of what the film means," said

DIRECTOR DAVID LYNCH

"Barry may have his idea of what the film means, and I may have my idea, and they may be two different things. The beauty of an abstract film is it's open to interpretation."



Jazzman Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) suspects that his wife Rene (Patricia Arquette) is having an affair—his first step down a lost highway to nowhere.

Lynch, "and I may have my own idea, and they may be two different things. And yet, we worked together on the same film. The beauty of a film that is more abstract is everybody has a different take. Nobody agrees on anything in the world today. When you are spoon-fed a film, more people instantly know what it is. I love things that leave room to dream and are open to various interpretations. It's a beautiful thing. It doesn't do any good for Barry to say 'This is what it means.' Film is what it means. If Barry or anyone else could capture what the film is in words, then that's poetry."

Still, Lynch insists he isn't being deliberately obtuse; he may not favor advancing a specific interpretation, but he does want the film open to interpretation. "There is a key in the film as to its meaning," Lynch continued, "but keys are weird. There are surface keys, and there are deeper keys. Intellectual thinking leaves you high and dry sometimes. Intuitive thinking where you get a marriage of feelings and intellect lets you *feel* the answers where you may not be able to articulate them. Those kinds of

things are used in life a lot, but we don't use them too much in cinema. There are films that stay more on the surface, and there's no problem interpreting their meaning."

One key to interpreting the film may—or may not—rest in the character known only as the Mystery Man. Played by Robert Blake, best known for realistic, streetwise characters such as *BARETTA*, the Mystery Man is the first overt moment in the film when the picture steps beyond the bounds of reality. He's a ghostly figure who can call himself on the phone and possibly direct Fate. He may even be Fate personified or Fred's conscience. Or not.

"The Mystery Man came from an old idea I had," said Lynch. "I told Barry a version of what ended up in the film. I was halfway through the story, and it looked like he wasn't listening to me. He just said, 'That's it!' and started writing stuff down. The character came out of a feeling of a man who, whether real or not, gave the impression that he was supernatural."

Blake may seem an odd choice for the role, but Lynch

admires the Emmy and People's Choice Award-winner not only for his skill as an actor, but for his uncompromising honesty. Wanting to work with Blake for quite a while, Lynch cast the actor against type even though Blake admitted that he didn't understand the script. "He was willing to take a chance," says Lynch. "Somewhere in talking and rehearsing, there is a magical moment where actors catch a current, they're on the right road. If they really catch it, then whatever they do from then on is correct and it all comes out of them from that point on."

Helping Lynch visualize his surreal Los Angeles were two long-time collaborators: producer-editor Mary Sweeney (*BLUE VELVET*, *WILD AT HEART*, *TWIN PEAKS*) and cinematographer Peter Deming (*HBO's HOTEL ROOM*, *ABC's ON THE AIR*).

A year and a half before *LOST HIGHWAY* was written, Sweeney had been preparing to begin work on another Lynch script. The producer didn't like the rewrites as much as the first draft, and told him so. "It kind of took the steam out of his enthusiasm for the project," said Sweeney. "It was a little tough for me to be honest with him, and it was hard for him to take it. So, it was with no little trepidation that I read *LOST HIGHWAY*, and I ripped through it. It was a great read, and I was so excited in doing it."

Sweeney is producer with Tom Sternberg and Deepak Nayar, who served as on-set producer, while Sweeney picked up the reins during post-production, when her editing skills came into play. Despite the free-flowing nature of the film, Sweeney admits to no problems piecing the work together. "Working with David is just great," she said. "He's an all-around filmmaker, very involved every step of the way, certainly in editing, which is very important. We work together very well. There was absolutely no fear; I told him what I thought all the time, and sometimes he wasn't thrilled."

I'll make a first cut during production; he gives me many notes and goes on his way. I'll make the changes, and he comes back. He had confidence in me, and our communication was good enough that he could tell me what he wants, knowing he'll get it. If it doesn't work on the cutting end, he accepts that. We do collaborate, but he is very much the director in the cutting room."

Conventional films can be restrictive in their linear narratives, but those restrictions provide guidelines for the filmmakers to follow: the leading man wouldn't disappear in the middle of the picture, and the film wouldn't end in the middle of a car chase. Still, editing *LOST HIGHWAY* was not as wide open as one might imagine. "All of that's in the script," said Sweeney. "David knew exactly what he wanted, and it's enhanced beautifully by the way he shoots things and how visual the film is. Working with him and getting dailies makes every day Christmas—all of the crew shows up; you can't believe what you're seeing; and it's all so exciting. It wasn't a walk on the wild side for me. The film is very close to the script."

"What's interesting with David is you have to cut knowing how you're going to work it out, which I do know very well," Sweeney continued. "You can trust certain things that feel awkward. He knows exactly what he's going to do, and it's going to be full of sounds. David does the sound design for *LOST HIGHWAY*. You just know the footage is going to be greatly enhanced. It's as old as the hills in filmmaking; the way you cut a scary sequence with music enhances it. There are sequences like that in the film. The transformation from Fred (Pullman) to Pete (Getty) has got terrific sounds."

Musical is another element that enhances a film, and *LOST HIGHWAY* mixes existing material from David Bowie, Smashing Pumpkins, Trent Reznor, Nine Inch Nails, Lou Reed, and Marilyn Manson (who appears in the film as 'Porno Star #1'), with an original score by Lynch collaborator

INTUITIVE INTERPRETATION

"There is a key to the film, but there are surface keys and deeper keys. Intellectual thinking leaves you high and dry sometimes; intuitive thinking lets you feel the answers."



After changing back to Fred Madison, Pullman speeds down the *Lost Highway*, pursued by police for the murder of Mr Eddy, in the film's delirious conclusion.

Angelo Badalamenti (*BLUE VELVET*, *TWIN PEAKS*).

For *LOST HIGHWAY*, most of the score was recorded in Prague, with additional compositions done in London. "David and Angelo work together in such a way," says Sweeney, "that long before they went to Prague, they had a couple sessions where they sat down and came up with some melodies that Angelo eventually translated to orchestral arrangements. Some of the music, like the end title music by David Bowie, was chosen by David in pre-production. He knew right away that's what he wanted for the end titles. Billy Corgan, Trent Reznor and some of that other stuff came in at the eleventh hour, and we had to figure out a place for them. We actually replaced a song with a song from Smashing Pumpkins."

"Music came in different stages," Sweeney continues. "All through post-production, David listened to music. He listens to music while he thinks about writing. It's really integral to him. He knows when something is completely ready and when it's not. We use temporary music tracks, but the problem with temp tracks is

you aren't using what you want in the end. The music will change, and your picture changes in how it's cut, which changes the internal rhythm of a scene and how it feels. We only use temp music as part of the process of selection. Once a song is in there, it's pretty much going to stay, except in that one case."

Another important key to the film's effectiveness is its cinematography. Unlike the brightly-lit comedies Peter Deming has worked on, such as *MY COUSIN VINNY*, *LOST HIGHWAY* offers a grayish, murky world of all-encompassing darkness. During the 1940s and 1950s, the heyday of film noir, black-and-white film stocks were used that were much slower and rendered shadows much more effectively than color stocks.

Lynch originally hoped to shoot *LOST HIGHWAY* in black-and-white, but the financial realities of releasing a mono-chrome picture to a color-spoiled audience kept that from happening. "In retrospect," said Deming, "I don't think filming in black and

white would have been the right way to go." To realize his noirish world, Lynch let Deming shoot *LOST HIGHWAY* in varying levels of darkness. The film is a little creepier than something that has contrast, with few exteriors or daylight scenes. Whenever he could, Deming consciously used hardly any light at all to keep contrast down.

"There are many places in the movie where I would normally use a back light, but didn't," Deming laughed. "So you have people kind of melding into the background. It's kind of an extension of when Fred walks down the hallway and disappears; it's keeping that feeling through the rest of the movie. In another film, a director would say, 'What about a back light?' and 90-percent of the time I'd put it there, but not for this movie. That was kind of fun."

"Sometimes I did things that, in other films, would be looked at as a mistake," Deming continued. "In this film, it may have been a mistake to begin with, but you embrace it!"—he laughed—"I took the look as far as I could. I've been watching David's work since *ERASERHEAD*, and had a feeling of images that he likes, both in watching his work and talking with him."

To ensure their planned darkness wouldn't be 'corrected' by a well-meaning processing lab, Deming kept in daily contact with the lab developing *LOST HIGHWAY*. He would warn the lab that they would be getting more of the same—either under or over exposed—and told them not to adjust the contrast. Deming was going for a "thought-out" darkness based on talks with Lynch, who usually left final lighting—or lack of it—up to his cinematographer.

"We talked about two or three scenes before we started shooting," Deming said. "Basically, we just talked about color and things like that. Once we rehearsed a scene, we discussed how dark he wanted to go. He would rehearse while I watched. Then he would go away as I lighted the scene. If he had any comments about the lighting, he would always men-

LOST HIGHWAY

David Lynch

The visionary director refuses to provide pat answers for his films.



Pete (Getty) dances with girlfriend Sheila (Natasha Gregson Wagner); his facial blemish is a vestige of the transformation from Fred Madison.

LOST HIGHWAY has many moments that clearly identify it as a "David Lynch Film," but that film did not spring from his mind alone. Having written many scripts on his own, what did he hope that co-writer Barry Gifford would add? "It's action and reaction when you're working with someone," said Lynch. "I think it's really wrong to say who does what and who wrote that. It's really kind of a chemical process: you put those two mechanisms together, and out comes something different than either one of us would do on our own. I don't know quite how it works, but we both tune in to the same thing, and suddenly it starts letting itself be known."

The unconventional script that resulted, set several challenges for Lynch as a director. For example, one crucial plot point that had to be visualized is the transition from Fred Madison into Pete Dinklage, which is presented almost subliminally. TERMINATOR 2-type computer morphing would have been inappropriate, because Madison is not some kind of shape-shifter disguising himself to escape prison; rather, he literally becomes a different person, with an established past, including a home, a family, a girlfriend, and a job. Trusting the power of visuals and sounds to suggest the change, Lynch wasn't worried about whether he could pull his audience past this strange narrative leap, "but other people were," he admitted. "Sometimes there's a difference between the script and the film. This is a case where people who were worried—when they saw the film, they had no problem. In script form, I think the intellectual mind is working more, and they have a problem." On the other hand, Lynch claimed that the unusual ending was never an issue at all. The audaciousness of stopping the film in mid-chase might seem like something that took considerable daring, but Lynch demurred, saying, "That didn't take any nerve; that's just the way it was supposed to be."

One of Lynch's unexpected coups is the casting of Robert Blake as the Mystery Man—a role that seems the antithesis of the actor's established image.

What made the director think this would work when the actor himself had his doubts? "Number One: Robert Blake's a great actor," said Lynch. "I've always respected him because he's his own man and he's not afraid to say what he's thinking. He's never been part of the Hollywood scene—well, maybe when he was younger, a little bit—but he's a loner. I just liked his work and always wanted to work with him myself. Actors get pigeon-holed and type-cast, and they all probably have nights when they say, 'Hey, why am I playing these things when I've got so much more to give?' You can see what people are capable of doing—which may not be what they've been doing. Robert Blake just seemed perfect for this role. We met for lunch, and he said he didn't understand the script, but we talked." That talk led to a possibly career defining performance.

Although LOST HIGHWAY was independently financed, the film did undergo a process normally associated with studio productions—a test screening, after which 25 minutes were cut. "Mary [Sweeny, producer] screened it for about fifty people," said Lynch. "It was early enough so that it would be a good time to get some input—we knew it was too long, but we knew we were going to do more things to it. Before Mary showed it, I saw the film with

In the film's first strange event, the Madisons receive anonymous videotapes from someone stalking and photographing their house—exterior and interior.



Barry, and it drove me crazy. I knew what we had to attack; we attacked those things and more, before we got it right.

"Even with only ten people, you can feel a film differently than if you see a film by yourself," he added. "By yourself, you're too relaxed, and you're not really forced to get that feeling of many people in the room—which is a horrific feeling, sometimes, but it forces you to see a film through a group's eyes, and you can learn a lot of things from it. Up to that time, you've been working scene by scene and getting the individual scenes working; but seeing it all at once, it could work great scene by scene, but as a whole, it doesn't"

Lynch is a director often praised (or damned) for his visuals, as if that were the beginning and end of his talent, but his films have often made innovative use of sound. In the case of LOST HIGHWAY, he handled the sound design himself. "Sound is fifty per cent at least—maybe forty per cent in some scenes, sixty per cent in other," he stated. "Sound and picture working together is what films are. It's many parts, and every part you try to get up to one hundred per cent so that the whole thing can jump when all the parts are there—it's magical. So every single sound has to be supporting that scene and enlarging it. A room is, say, nine by twelve, but when you're introducing sound to it, you can create a space that's giant, hearing things outside the room or feeling certain things through a vent, and then there are abstract sounds that are like music—they give emotions and set different moods. Then music comes in. Transitions from sound effects to musical sound effects to music, or all things going at once, it's all letting the film talk to you."

Steve Biodrowski



With assistance from cinematographer Pete Deming, Lynch sets up the shot of the absurdly grotesque death of Andy (Michael Massee).

tion them. Fortunately it wasn't too often, but it did happen. It's not something I dread. I kind of look forward to it."

Deming relied on spot metering and cranked-down F-stops when shooting dark scenes. Some sequences became so dark that viewers have to lean forward and squint to see what is happening on screen. "I remember when Oliver Stone's JFK came out," said Deming. "[Cinematographer] Bob

Richard Pryor appears as the owner of the garage where Pete works.



Richardson did a lot of cool stuff with over exposure, burning people out. I joked that maybe I'll do the same thing with underexposure. Somehow, I don't think it will take off quite as much. The thing I wanted to achieve was giving the feeling that anything could come out of the background, and to leave a certain question about what you're looking at. The film is working under the surface while you're watching it."

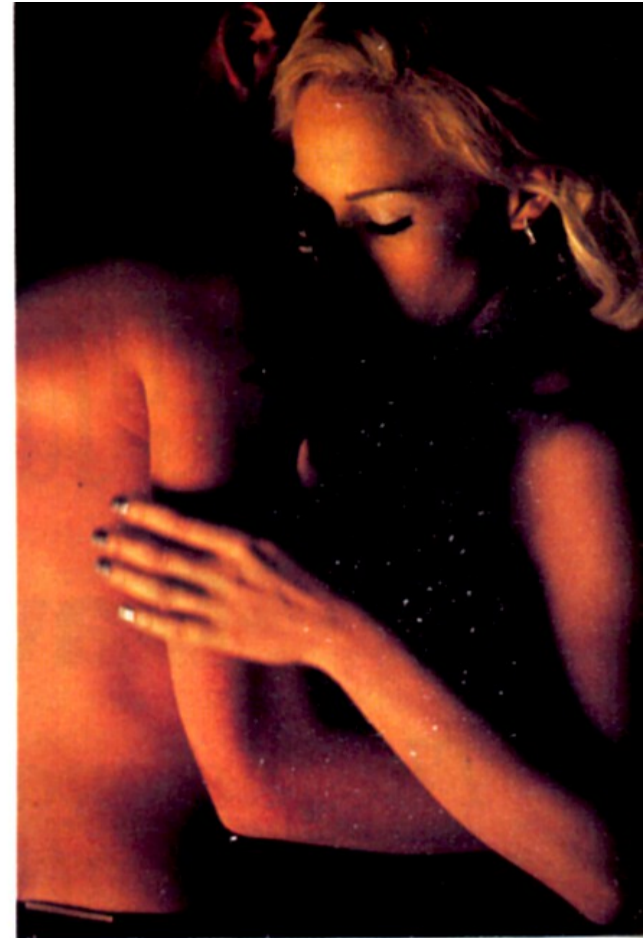
This modus operandi sets up the Mystery Man who at first seems almost a subliminal presence, until he makes eye contact and steps forward. Another image that LOST HIGHWAY offers to keep viewers talking is Fred's transition into Pete. Not only do main characters change (or do they?), but the plot goes off into another direction (or does it?). Deming did several things to visually distinguish Fred's and Pete's stories. "Fred's story is certainly darker than Pete's," Deming said. "For Pete, we did a little more with weird compo-

sitions. To try to get inside his head, David kept throwing the focus out of scenes by pulling the lens in and out while we were shooting. I think we also backed off the color a little bit from the richness in the beginning of the movie. But we didn't want to drastically change looks because for most people who see it, the first connection is that these two guys are the same guy. Because of that, you don't want to distinguish the two sections of the film too much."

Pete's story comes across as the more classically narrative of the two (or is it just the one?) stories. Fred's story takes place primarily in his house, whereas Pete's tale is a bit more mobile. To further confuse clarity, which gleefully seems to be Lynch's forte, Fred appears to become Pete, then switch back again. More of the transformation was shot than actually used. Lynch's sensibility is not to give audiences too much information about what is really happening, preferring to let them imagine details from the snippets offered.

With all the planning, a few happy accidents during production did catch Lynch's fancy. One such happenstance occurred during the rehearsal of a dolly shot. At the end of the rehearsal, Lynch saw the image on a monitor as the dolly was being brought back to its original position, while the camera remained stationary. The director liked the resulting image better than what was planned and wound up using it.

Another time, first assistant director Scott Cameron was changing lenses, as Lynch sat by looking at the monitor. The screen went from sharpness at one focal length, to blur, to focus, at a new focal length. He was impressed with the image and decided to experiment with it while shooting. But for all the planning and lucky breaks in the world, filmmaking, at best, is a perfect physical representation of Murphy's Law, and Deming found himself challenged by LOST HIGHWAY's excursions outdoors, where scenes were suddenly bright and contrasty, compared to the created murk of the film's interiors. The



Pete carries on a dangerous affair with Alice, as if trying to recapture the romance between Rene and Fred.

biggest challenge came with the nighttime desert scenes, when aesthetics became secondary to mere logistics.

"The weather alternated between cold and wind, dusty and dirty," said Deming. "We had a lot of different lighting elements with us. The rig for Fred's drive at the end was pretty elaborate; we had a semi with two generators pulling us in order to have enough power to do what we needed. It was a pretty interesting image as it drove through the middle of nowhere, with everything around it black as night."

The first cut of LOST HIGHWAY ran two-and-a-half hours. Mary Sweeney hand-picked an audience of 50 people of varying backgrounds and ages to get a variety of impressions. Lynch knew the film was too long, and realized what had to be cut, and the comments of the 50 solidi-

Not just physically different, Pete has a complete life, including a job.



ACCESSING THE AUDIENCE

“You don’t really know how large a section of the population is going [to like your film], said Lynch. “The only thing you can do is make it and not worry what will happen.””

fied for him what had to go, even though some of the decisions were difficult to make.

“There was a lot of stuff about Pete’s life with his buddies,” said Sweeney. “There were a couple of great scenes that were visually so fantastic that I hated to lose them, so we kept them in. Pete goes out with his friends, first to the drive-in, then to the bowling alley, where he’s dancing with Sheila (Natasha Gregson Wagner), and both of those scenes are significant. We lost a lot in that area, and immediately after the transformation there are a couple of things that weren’t moving the story forward. It all had to do with Pete’s life, which were scenes that weren’t going to give people the answers they were looking for. Those scenes were just hanging there.”

The film was eventually cut down to two hours, ten minutes. An earlier scene that was lost illustrated the tenuous relationship between Fred and his wife. It was one of those character-revealing scenes that could be done without. If it happened to be a clue as to the ultimate meaning of *LOST HIGHWAY*, we’ll never know. The film is meant to cause discussion, but such films can lead

The late Jack Nance (*ERASERHEAD*) made his last appearance in the film.

well-intentioned amateur philosophers astray as they lock onto insignificant scenes or actions, thinking them to be genuine clues. If viewers do that with *LOST HIGHWAY*, Sweeney and Lynch will be quite pleased to have stirred the viewer anyway.

“David sings praises to those people,” says Sweeney. “He gives a lot of details. People give the film a significance that tells part of their own story, and that makes David so happy. I’ve had people give very funny reactions. There are all kinds of explanations for who Patricia Arquette (playing both Fred’s wife and Pete’s girlfriend) is; Fred is having a dream about the type of person he’d like to be with, or someone he used to be with, or she’s his alter ego. People come up with great stories and I can’t say if they’re right or wrong. Students write their theses on David’s movies—and they write fascinating things—but it’s not what David was thinking when he made the film. People read a lot into his work. I think it’s great. You stimulate people. That’s very satisfying for an artist.”

Sweeney hopes audiences will embrace *LOST HIGHWAY* for the intentionally unresolvable puzzle it was meant to be, and don’t resent the lack of concrete answers. Lynch’s intention was to bring dreams into the theaters that viewers can connect with on their own terms, not on the filmmaker’s.

“David has a very strong vision, and in other ways he’s very reckless,” says Sweeney. “He has no fear. The more well-known you get, the more difficult that becomes. I’m very proud that he’s still ‘out there.’ He’s always lamenting that he



Imprisoned for murdering his wife, Fred (below) changes into Pete (above). Lynch minimized the transformation footage to an almost subliminal approach.

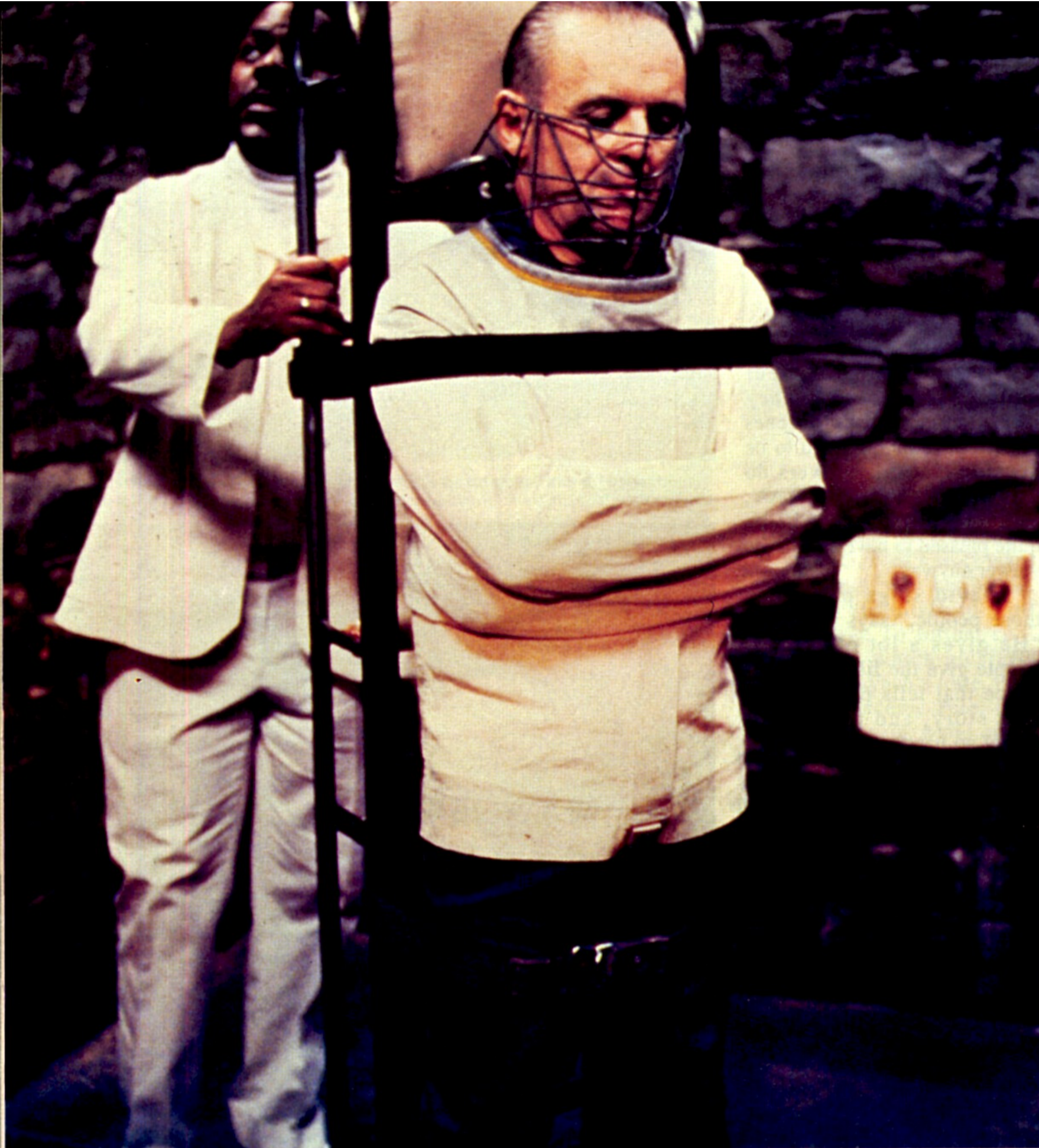


wants to change his name, get a wig, grow a beard, make a movie as a complete unknown and see how people take it. His films are so recognizable that he couldn’t do that, but could another person come along and make something like this? It’s an interesting question.”

Lynch’s reputation certainly precedes him on everything he does, but he finds that to be a good thing. “You find out

when you screen a movie for people how it’s going,” he says, “but you don’t really know how large a section of the population is going to take it. You have to check things within yourself, let that be your guide and hope for the best when it’s finished. The only thing you can do is make your film and not worry about what will happen. Just stay true to yourself.” □





A complete anomaly, *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* swept the major categories—the only horror film to win for Best Picture. Oscar-winners Anthony Hopkins (Best Actor) and Jonathan Demme (Best Director) rehearse during filming in 1990.



GO!

A (far too

They aren't usually foreign, three-hour epics or dramas about an incurable disease, so genre films generally have it tough on Oscar night. They are usually films that have featured innovative directing, writing and acting, packing multiplexes during the top movie-going seasons, yet come time for the most coveted nominations in Hollywood, they're forgotten faster than yesterday's *Variety* headline.

Through the years, there have been many surprising inclusions and omissions of genre films in various Oscar categories. The Oscar awards began in 1927 (believe it or not, presentation of the first awards took about five minutes and was barely covered by the press!) and in those early days, some genre classics, such as *METROPOLIS* (1927), *DRACULA* (1931), *KING KONG* (1933), and *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (1933) were all completely shut-out of the Oscar competition, despite their popularity with critics and audiences.

Yet, some of these early genre films did make it into competition. At the 1931-32 Oscars, Frederick March was awarded the Best Actor honor for his performance(s) in *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*. Seven years later, *THE WIZARD OF OZ* received multiple nominations, including one for Best Picture. 1939 also saw the introduction of the Visual Effects Oscar, which opened up the awards more for genre films (*THIEF OF BAGDAD* would win the following year).

Throughout the '40s, many

BY MIKE LYONS

NG FOR THE GOLD

short) history of the genre's Oscar winners.

popular films, which happen to fall into the *cinéfantastique* category, found themselves quite lucky on Oscar night. 1941's **HERE COMES MR. JORDAN**, which told the story of a prizefighter who is sent to heaven before his time and is then sent back down to earth to inhabit another body, received numerous nominations, including Best Picture and even took home the gold for Best Original Story (a now defunct category). The film was re-made in 1978 as **HEAVEN CAN WAIT**, another genre film that received numerous major Oscar nods.

Three fantasies, which have become holiday perennials, were also favored by Oscar. **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE** (1946), **THE BISHOP'S WIFE** and **MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET** (1947), were all up for Best Picture and other major awards, in their respective years. In the latter film, Edmund Gwenn even took home the Best Supporting Actor honors for his portrayal of Macy's St. Nick. In his acceptance speech, the actor said, "Now I know there's a Santa Claus." **MIRACLE** also won for Best Screenplay.

In the 1950s, horror, science-fiction, and fantasy would become pigeonholed as teenage fodder for the many drive-ins that now dotted the landscape. Some films from this decade, such as **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**, **THE THING** (1951), and **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN** (1957) were tremendous hits and inspired a generation of movie-goers and filmmakers. Despite this fact, these and other genre classics were excluded from all the major Oscar awards.

In the '60s, the crossover appeal of many studio genre films,



The horror genre's first Academy Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role went to Frederick March for **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE** (1932).

helped give them a boost on Oscar night. Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece, **PSYCHO** (1960), not only ruined showers forever but also garnered nominations for its director and supporting actress Janet Leigh (believe it or not, Bernard Herrmann's chilling, and often imitated, musical score wasn't nominated).

Four years later, one of Walt Disney's most popular and charming musical fantasies, **MARY POPPINS**, gathered a whopping 13 Oscar nominations, winning five for Actress (Julie Andrews), Song, Score, Editing and Visual Effects. Another musical fantasy, **DOCTOR DOLITTLE** (1967), found itself in the midst of a controversy when it received a surprise nomination for Best Picture. During the Oscar campaign (when studios do almost anything to "push" their films in Academy voter's faces), 20th Century Fox preceded all their screenings of **DOCTOR DOLITTLE** with champagne,

cocktails, and a buffet dinner. Many in the industry say that this helped the good **DOCTOR** receive the coveted nomination.

The following year, Stanley Kubrick's **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**, received nominations for Best Picture, Screenplay, Art Direction and a win

for Visual Effects. However, despite the fact that many consider this to be one of the great masterpieces of film, it failed to receive a nod for Best Picture. Another genre classic, **PLANET OF THE APES**, released the same year, received a special Oscar, awarded to John Chambers for his outstanding make-up work in the film.

In the '70s, numerous popular genre films would be recognized by the Academy. **A CLOCKWORK ORANGE** (1971) and **THE EXORCIST** (1973), received numerous nominations, including Best Picture; in fact, **THE EXORCIST** was the most honored horror film up to that time, with ten nominations (although it won only two, for its sound design and its script). **JAWS** (1975) also received a Best Picture nomination; Steven Spielberg, however, was not nominated for Best Director for **JAWS**. The director later claimed that there was a "JAWS backlash"; the film had made too much money to be taken seriously in such a forum as the Oscars.

Defying conventions, **THE EXORCIST**, directed by William Friedkin (below) is one of the few horror film ever to receive a nomination for Best Picture.



OSCAR GOLD

DISPLACED WINNERS?

Even if genre films don't earn awards, their filmmakers sometimes do.

Tom Cruise has been getting some of the best reviews of his career for *JERRY MAGUIRE*, his end of the year release. Certainly, the critics have been far more excessive in their praise than they were for high-tech sci-fi spy pic *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, which came out last summer. Sitting here on the eve of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' announcement of their nominations, I cannot help wondering whether this competent—but hardly outstanding—performance will net the actor a nod from the Oscar. Paranoid? Well, maybe. However, the Academy has set a precedent of honoring mainstream work from people who have released a genre film earlier in the year.

In the summer of 1983, the fantasy *KRULL* was released to indifferent audience response and outright critical hostility. Yet its director, Peter Yates went on to earn an Academy Award nomination for his work on *THE DRESSER*, a respectable but rather dull film released later the same year. In fact, *THE DRESSER* received a slew of nominations; now, one could argue that this was because the material was better, but are we really to believe that Yates' work as a director miraculously improved between the two films? Or, more likely, was the Academy honoring his work on that film simply because of the kind of film it was?

In 1987, Dennis Hopper found himself nominated for his supporting performance in the previous year's *HOOSIERS*. Not a bad acting job, to be sure, but even Hopper himself was reportedly astounded that the Academy had chosen to single out that performance over his frightening turn in David Lynch's *BLUE VELVET*.

After this, the events of 1993 should have come as no surprise. Steven Spielberg's *JURASSIC PARK* opened in the summer to



SCHINDLER'S LIST (above) won Best Picture the same year that **JURASSIC PARK** broke boxoffice records. Coincidence or not?

recording-breaking boxoffice records, but begrudging reviews. Almost no critic was willing to endorse the film whole-heartedly. A variety of specious reasons were advanced for this, but the bottom line is that the film was science-fiction and therefore not to be taken seriously. On the other hand, a subject like the Holocaust demands to be taken seriously, so the response to *SCHINDLER'S LIST* later that year was overwhelmingly positive—so overwhelming, in fact, that the film won Oscars for Best Picture and Best Director.

Now this is not to imply that *SCHINDLER'S LIST* didn't deserve its accolades. (It certainly did.) But one cannot help wondering whether its Oscar triumph did not receive a little boost from *JURASSIC PARK*. How many voters thought, "Well, that dinosaur movie was a lot of fun, but I'm glad to see Spielberg has turned his talents to something really important." In fact, it is even conceivable that many voters hadn't even seen

SCHINDLER'S LIST, but few if any hadn't seen *JURASSIC PARK*; when it came time to pick Best Director, you can bet that having a mega-successful film out that year didn't hurt.

We'll never know, of course, what, if any, role this played, and the truth is that, if *SCHINDLER'S LIST* hadn't been as good as it was, no amount of boost from *JURASSIC PARK* would have helped it. My point is that I believe voters like genre films as much as anybody else, but they don't feel comfortable bestowing awards on them; therefore, they wait until genre filmmakers turn to mainstream projects. This is commonly seen as a maturation process—leaving behind childish fantasy and turning to dramatic reality. But heaven help the filmmaker who "regresses." For example, Tim Burton earned some of his best reviews for *ED WOOD*, a biography, and the film garnered Oscars for Martin Landau and Rick Baker. But look what happened when Burton follows up that critical success with *MARS ATTACKS!* Who knows? If he had released *ED WOOD* after *MARS ATTACKS!* it might have gone on to win Best Picture.

Steve Biodrowski

One year later, Sissy Spacek and Piper Laurie would both receive nominations for their roles in Brian DePalma's film of Stephen King's novel *CARRIE*, but it was the following year, with one of the biggest genre films ever, that the worlds of Oscar and *cinéfantastique* would collide as never before.

STAR WARS was not the type of film that traditionally received Academy Award nominations, but not even the Academy could deny the film's overwhelming popularity and lavished George Lucas' space opera with nine Oscar nominations, including Best Picture. *STAR WARS* then went on to win six of those awards, including one for John Williams now-famous score.

That same year, Steven Spielberg finally received his first Best Director nomination for *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND*, but in another frustrating move for the director, the film itself failed to be nominated. In subsequent years, Spielberg would have little to fret over. His next two films, *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* (1981) and 1982's *E.T.—THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL*, would not only join the list of some of the most popular movies of all time, but both also received numerous Oscar nominations, including Best Picture and two more nods for Spielberg as Best Director. (He would eventually win, though not for a genre film.)

The '80s delivered a flurry of big-budget genre films; many of them, such as *GHOSTBUSTERS* (1984), *BACK TO THE FUTURE* (1985), and *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT* (1988), became the boxoffice winner for their respective year. Despite such immense popularity, none were recognized by the Academy with Best Picture nominations, receiving only technical and honorary Oscars (or what many would call "token awards").

This brought to light the fact that being a boxoffice success was both a blessing and a curse (as Spielberg had alluded to with *JAWS*). It seemed that the Academy frowned on such high numbers at the boxoffice, which somehow labeled a film

continued on page 61

GENRE OSCAR PICKS

Oscar has a way of overlooking *cinéfantastique*, except in technical categories (remember last year when *12 MONKEYS* was nominated, not for its script but for its costumes!). In an effort to counteract this oversight, we offer the following list. Not all the entries below deserve to win in their categories. Rather, we are pointing to outstanding examples in each field that deserve to be nominated along with the best of what mainstream cinema has to offer. (Note: As we are only picking efforts good enough to rank among the five best of the year, not all categories are listed; if there were no standouts, we omitted the category.)

PICTURE

There were a lot of entertaining genre films this year, but few, if any, were the kind of standouts that transcend their genre to be regarded simply as great films in their own right. Probably the best film reviewed in our pages this year was *DEAD MAN*, which is at most a marginal entry. Still, with little else to mouth a serious challenge we'll make that our pick.

DIRECTOR

For all its out-of-control wildness and occasionally misfiring jokes, the tone of *MARS ATTACKS!* is perfectly suited to the material at hand, turning moments that read in the script as merely disgustingly awful (a talking severed human head, a dog's head transplanted onto a human body) into wickedly gleeful black humor. Most people give Tim Burton credit only for having a colorfully cartoony visual sense, but turning this orgy of destruction into a wicked piece of satire shows he deserves far more credit than that.

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Jim Jarmusch's script for *DEAD MAN* is an amazing, sophisticated piece of work, both entertaining and thoughtful.

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Technically, Kazunori Ito's work in *GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE*

Bess Watson's moving performance in *BREAKING THE WAVES* was a standout.



DEAD MAN was the most sophisticated genre effort this year.

UNIVERSE isn't eligible this year, because the film did not play a full week in Los Angeles last year. However, his adaptation of the manga *GHOST IN THE SHELL* did qualify—and proved to be one of the best examples of cyberpunk cinema yet—an influential literary genre that has resulted in surprisingly few good films.

ACTOR

Everybody remembers (deservedly so) Eddie Murphy's multiple performance(s) in *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. But our pick goes to the less noted but far trickier work of Michael Keaton in *MULTIPLICITY*, playing not four different characters, but four clearly delineated aspects of the same character.

ACTRESS

Bess Watson shone brightly in Lars Von Trier's *BREAKING THE WAVES*. Again, the genre element is small, but we won't let that stand in the way of recognizing talent.

SUPPORTING ACTOR

Whatever the strengths or weakness of its story, nobody knew what kind of tone to use in *THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO*—nobody except Udo Kier, in his supporting role as the Puppetmaster. His flamboyant, broad performance perfectly captured a sense of storybook villainy brought to life, rather like one of the better Disney villains as if played in live-action (i.e., what Dustin Hoffman was attempting in *HOOK*, only done much better).

SUPPORTING ACTRESS

There was not a lot of impressive work in this category—not fault of the actresses but there just weren't that many great supporting roles. But rather than let Glenn Close's overrated turn in *101 DALMATIANS* go unchallenged, we would suggest that both Dee Wallace Stone in *THE FRIGHTENERS* and Alice Krige in *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT* did better work.

FOREIGN FILM

GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE. This is not the kind of film a foreign country would ever submit as its official entry, but it far and away outshines the sort of lugubrious, serious efforts that do get nominated.

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

This category is usually mutually exclusive of fantasy, but this year the amazing *MICROCOSMOS* somehow bridged the gap, exploring the microscopic world of insects as if delving into the most amazing alternate universe ever conceived in science-fiction. With only the barest snippet of narration at the very beginning, this film lets its images do the talking.

LIVE-ACTION SHORT

L5: CITY IN SPACE is an overwhelming visual experience. The IMAX format, 3-D photography and stereo sound will make you feel as if you really have been to the titular city.

ART DIRECTION

Neither *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* nor *THE CROW—CITY OF ANGELS* lived up to their predecessors, but both made good use of Los Angeles to create worlds both futuristic and familiar. In the former, Lawrence G. Paull obviously had great fun devastating the town, whereas *THE CROW*'s Alex McDowell turned the city into some kind of neo-Gothic alternate reality.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

There was lots of good work in this department, but Robby Muller's black-white lensing in *DEAD MAN* is a luminous standout.

EDITING

TWISTER moved like the wind and swept its audience along for the ride. *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE* was not nearly so breathless, but despite the critical reaction it was a tightly structured spy thriller that moved along quite nicely even at its extended length.

MAKEUP

Rick Baker's work on Eddie Murphy in *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR* was not only amazing but so completely believable that you almost forgot to be impressed and instead sat back and enjoyed the movie.

DRAMATIC SCORE

There's probably too much good work to pick out a single entry in this category, including Jerry Goldsmith's work on the latest *TREK* feature and Randy Edelman's score for *DRAGONHEART*. *MARS*

ATTACKS!, however, was probably the trickiest assignment—a score that that to suggest echoes of '50s sci-fi without descending into mere parody, while enhancing the antic and macabre visuals with just the right touch of wit.

ORIGINAL SCORE

Everybody jumped all over *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* for supposedly not living up to its predecessors in this department. If anything, however, the songs were better integrated into the dramatic narrative than ever before, enhancing the story without stopping the flow (the likable but intrusive "A Guy Like You" being the only exception).

ORIGINAL SONG

"Hellfire," from *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*. Instead of having Bette Midler sing a pop version of "God Help the Outcasts," don't you just wish they had had Alice Cooper do a version of this?

SOUND

No one, not even the voters, have a clear handle on what distinguishes this from the Sound Effects Editing category. Usually, the loudest movie of the year wins both awards. This year *INDEPENDENCE DAY* and *TWISTER* are obvious choices that enhanced their visuals with densely layered soundtracks.

VISUAL EFFECTS

This is one of the categories in which a genre film can often expect to win, and this year was filled with potential nominees: *DRAGONHEART*, *TWISTER*, *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, *MULTIPLICITY*, *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. But looking less at just technical proficiency and more at what the effects contributed to the film, *MARS ATTACKS!* deserves credit for making such a major contribution to the finished work of art. Not just CGI marvels, those Martians become integral characters, and for once the cartoony, not quite realistic look of the computer animation actually works for the film. For helping to realize the truly unique vision of Tim Burton, this film deserves a nomination. □

Michael Keaton's work in *MULTIPLICITY* warrants a nod.



CINEMA

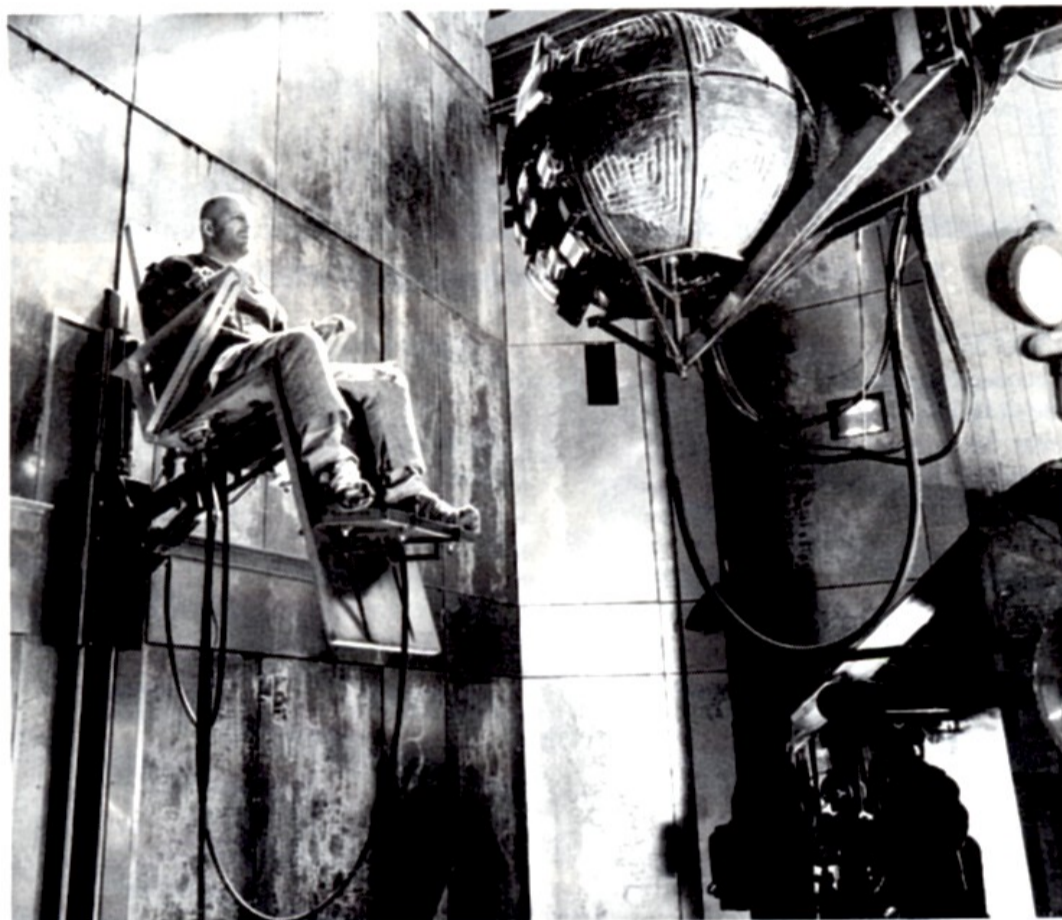
By Steve Biodrowski

A YEAR OF OVERWHELMING FILMS?

Sound and fury, short on diversity and intelligence.

It might be fair to say that 1996 was an overwhelming year for genre films. Well, no, actually it would be better to say that it was a year of overwhelming genre films—that is, films like *TWISTER* and *INDEPENDENCE DAY* that were specifically designed to overwhelm audiences with powerhouse special effects and non-stop action. Unlike many film critics, I find nothing wrong with films of this sort, and I think they made for an entertaining year at the cinema. However, it is safe to say the range of good genre films was much more limited this year than it was in 1995, which gave us not only effects and action but also diversity. In fact, if you were looking for an intelligent, sophisticated science-fiction effort—well, you could find it, but you had to look hard, because films like *GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE* and *GHOST IN THE SHELL* didn't get anything resembling a major release. This is in contrast to 1995, which offered a variety of intelligent films, not only at the art house level but also in mainstream terms: *BABE*, *SEVEN*, *THE SECRET OF ROAN ISH*, *THE PROPHECY*. In fact, stretching a point, it is almost fair to say that the best science-fiction film of 1996 was, technically, a 1995 release: *12 MONKEYS*

The science was minimal, the story meager, but that didn't stop *TWISTER* from rocking audiences.



12 MONKEYS, the most ambitious, intelligent science fiction film of the year, was technically a 1995 release, although it played mostly in 1996.

opened exclusively in New York and Los Angeles during the last week of December but did not open wide until January. The film was also a complete surprise in terms of a major studio release—a challenging, difficult work that actually managed to please fans, critics, and general audiences.

No major studio release of 1996 came close to that achievement, but that doesn't mean things were all bad. The heavily hyped summer behemoths actually turned out to be a lot of fun, and for those wanting more and willing to look for it, there were sparkling gems to be found. (NOTE: For the Oscar picks on the previous page, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' rules of eligibility were employed: a film had to play one full week in Los Angeles to qualify as a 1996 release, except in the case of foreign language film; for this list, however, any screening open to the general public, even a single midnight showing, is qualification enough.)

THE BEST

Choosing a Number One pick for 1996 is tricky—*DEAD MAN* was barely genre, and *GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE* was barely released. For the purposes of this column, however, those factors do not outweigh quality, and both films were probably

better than any of the major studio genre releases. What follows, consequently, is a little bit of a jumble, as I try to reconcile the importance of the genre elements versus each film's overall effectiveness.

1. *DEAD MAN*, although superficially a Western, is structured as a sort of spiritual awakening, with Johnny Depp's titular character gradually taking on the mantle of the poet William Blake. The film at first seems to be set in a recognizable, if somewhat bizarre, version of the real world, but as the story progresses events stretch the boundaries of reality more and more. A hypnotic, haunting achievement, writer-director Jim Jarmusch's excellent black-and-white film is just so memorably surreal—intelligent and entertaining—that it earns the top spot on our list, above more obvious genre entries.

2. One of, if not the most, unexpected entries on this year's list is *GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*. With a two-hundred foot benevolent, flying turtle, the film is obviously fantasy, yet the filmmakers treat the material like a serious science-fiction effort. They never condescend to the material, nor assume that the impossibility of the premise grants them license to do less than excellent work. The

craftsmanship here—in terms of directing, acting, and production values—is superb. The effects are not as technically sophisticated as those in U.S. productions, but they are well designed and utilized, and convincingly integrated into the rest of the film, which earns enough suspensions of disbelief on our part that we overlook any minor flaws. A real triumph of cinematography, this film deserved at least as much of a release as the mediocre *POWER RANGERS* movie a couple years ago.

3. *MARS ATTACKS!* was far from perfect, but then the best of Tim Burton's work has often been erratic, as well as eccentric. But it is just those eccentricities that make his work stand out from the rest, and they are on full view here. Long adept at portraying demented clown-like characters who are sometimes benevolent (*PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE*) and sometimes malevolent (the Joker), Burton opts for the latter approach here, giving us not a single homicidal lunatic but an entire planetful. After the more grounded reality of *ED WOOD*, this film was misinterpreted as a regression to his early, cartoony work. The truth is that this is an explosion of imaginative weirdness, and I don't mean just the Martian effects; certainly the human characters are every bit as strange and entertaining in their reactions to the decimation around them. For daring to be so strange—instead of opting for the easy patriotism of *INDEPENDENCE DAY*—and for carrying it off with such panache, this earns the highest slot of any studio film this year.

4. *TWISTER* has only a minimal science-fiction element to qualify for inclusion in our pages: the storm-chasers attempt to put some kind of high-tech gizmo in the vortex of the tornado in order to learn how to create a more advanced early warning system. This is merely an excuse to stage a number of mind-numbing tornado scenes, which director Jan DeBont handles with complete effectiveness. Three of the more amazing achievements of this film are: (1) it manages to repeatedly top the stunning and apparently untoppable opening scene; (2) it manages to sustain itself almost entirely on the momentum of the chase; and (3) for all its

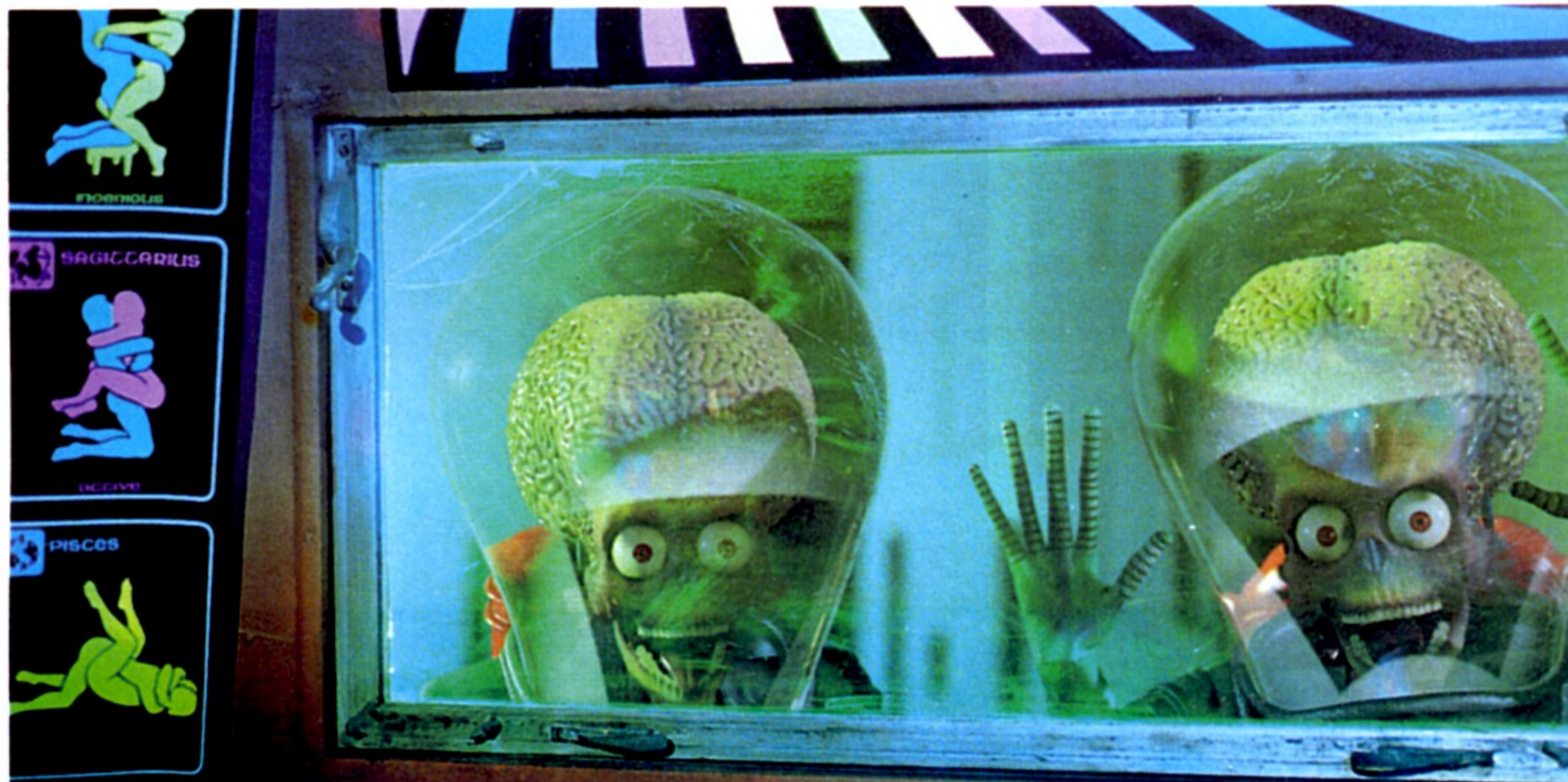


one-note approach, it never wears out its welcome. A film this effective in its simplicity cannot help receiving unfortunate backlash from critics (some in the pages of this very magazine), but the truth is that all their carping cannot diminish the obvious entertainment value of this effort.

5. **INDEPENDENCE DAY.** What can you say? They came; they saw; they conquered. No, not the aliens in the film; I mean Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin. After *MOON 44*, a mediocre pastiche of American science-fiction filmed in Germany, they came to America and in less than a decade refined their formula to the point where they could churn out an action-packed extravaganza that actually built up some genuine tension amidst all the fiery spectacle. By now we all know the plot deficiencies (Mac-compatible aliens), the sentimental overreaching (we cheer the survival of a pet dog while countless humans die), and the feel good manipulation (no one seems too terribly upset over their dead friends). With a little more effort Devlin and Emmerich could have overcome these flaws, but even as it stands the effectiveness of the film speaks for itself. Although not as well sustained as *TWISTER*, this film delivered everything we ever wanted from an alien invasion film; it was as if everything you ever dreamed of while looking at posters from '50s sci-fi flicks actually made it off the posters and onto the screen.

6. The animated *GHOST IN THE SHELL* took on far weightier issues than either *TWISTER* or *INDEPENDENCE DAY*: What is

GAMERA GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE was given a token release in several calendar theatres in various cities around the country, but it deserved more.



Although erratic (like much of Tim Burton's work), the strengths of *MARS ATTACKS* far outweighed its weaknesses.

identity; Can artificial intelligence have a soul, etc. In effect, it was closer in spirit to *DEAD MAN* than to either of those summer blockbusters, at least in terms of its aspirations. Unfortunately, it occasionally sagged under the weight of its philosophical speculation—but only to a degree. Overall, this is an exciting effort, with an interesting premise, a strong plot, and involving characters. It ranks among the best animated features ever to reach these shores from Japan, and those of you who missed its limited theatrical run are advised to check it out on video.

7. **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE** was written off as another summer action movie, despite the fact that there is very little action until the climactic bullet train chase at the conclusion. What this film really is,

is a convoluted high-tech spy thriller that works on building suspense from a sense of isolation and paranoia. Director Brian DePalma's stock in trade has never been the misogyny of which he is accused; rather, it is the portrayal of gifted youngsters who are betrayed by their father authority figures. He manages to infuse that element into this film, turning what could have been a faceless studio flick into an underrated auteur piece. Tom Cruise, by the way, is really no better in the critical fave *JERRY MAGUIRE* that earned him big reviews at year's end; in fact, his self-confident image worked at least as well here, where it was not stretched to sentimental extremes.

8. **STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT** hit all the notes required to please fans of the franchise, providing the kind of familiar schtick one has come to expect from the characters. What it also managed to do was generate some real excitement apart from the obligatory motifs. This tale of a Borg invasion of Earth was played out on a much smaller scale than *INDEPENDENCE DAY* (we really only see the gradual assimilation of the *Enterprise*), but it was almost as effective. The scenes on 21st-century Earth, involving the inventor of Warp Drive (James Cromwell), were pretty much a standard issue *NEXT GENERATION* B-story, which allows the filmmakers to cut away from the main story at periodic intervals. Fortunately, that main story is powerful enough to overcome the interruptions. It also has the benefit of Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart)'s own inner strug-

gle to give up his obsessive desire to destroy the Borg—at whatever cost. This sort of dramatic element, nowhere apparent in *ID4*, is what always made *STAR TREK* stand out from much of the rest of filmed science-fiction; no mere effects show, *TREK* featured stories about interesting heroes who were recognizable to us even if they do live hundreds of years in the future.

9. **MULTIPLICITY** was a much more interesting character study than the summer's other science-fiction comedy, *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. For some reason, audiences didn't take to it, but it is a very entertaining film that takes a fanciful premise and works out all its extrapolations in a humorous way. The story is strong enough that this film could have been played straight, and in a way it is: the film rarely diminishes its overall effectiveness by stooping to a cheap laugh, when the natural unfolding of the story generates its own spontaneous humor; and Michael Keaton, playing four versions of the same characters (the original and three clones) delivers an acting performance that portrays the character(s) with a wide range of comic activity—not the out-of-control antics of a manic comedian using a role as a forum for his routines. The characterizations are bright, and the comic timing (thanks to director Harold Ramis) is precise.

10. Disney has scored so big and so often with their animated musicals that it seems almost de rigeur at this point to include *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* in the



Top Ten. Resisting the all-too-common impulse to berate the film simply because we've seen it several times before, let's take the opportunity to point out that it is in some ways better than its predecessors. The plot may not have much to do with Victor Hugo, but what remains elevates the film to an appreciably adult level. The songs are, for the most part, better incorporated into the story than they have been since *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, and the level of spectacle—colossal architecture, crowd scenes, and the ever-popular storming of the cathedral (a highlight of any version of *HUNCHBACK*) are a truly spectacular achievement in the animation medium.

HONORABLE MENTION

If I were picking a film merely by a ratio of results versus expectations, then *BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA* would have ranked number one. Who would have expected that this apparently short subject idea would stretch to feature length without overstaying its welcome? Creator Mike Judge's wise-ass sense of humor is a welcome antidote to much of what passes for comedy these days. Especially impressive is his ability to derive laughs from these two obnoxious characters without ever endorsing them. Compare this to the near sociopathic behavior exhibited by Jim Carrey in *THE CABLE GUY*—and we're still supposed to find him lovable and sympathetic! Thankfully, Judge never tries to "humanize" his dumb and dumber duo—a wise decision, because much of the humor results from the fact that, no matter what their situation (even on the point of death) these two guys are always blissful-



The alien mothership blasts away human civilization in *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, a big-budget behemoth that delivered on its promise of cataclysmic destruction.

ly, ignorantly, exactly the same.

For a real change of pace from the above-mentioned film, there is *BREAKING THE WAVES*, Lars Von Trier's metaphysical melodrama of religious faith. The film flirts with the existence of supernatural intervention for most of its length (over two and a half hours) before coming to a conclusion in the very last shot. Although the film is probably longer than it really needs to be to make its point, the agony of the tormented Bess (Emily Watson), who thinks God is punishing her for selfishness, is enough to hold viewer attention.

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE did an excellent job of deconstructing the 1950s mentality of *THIS ISLAND EARTH*, and besides how else are you going to see that sci-fi classic on a big screen these days? The commentary was on-target when Mike Nelson and the 'bots were

watching the movie—within a movie—but the wraparound sequences aboard the Satellite of Love were less than inspired. The final episode of the TV show to air on Comedy Central actually did a far superior job in this regard; if the feature's host segments had been as good, this might have made it into the Top Ten.

MUPPET TREASURE ISLAND, rather like *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*, showed that a classic always works: it saves the filmmakers (whose strength may not lie in narrative) from having to construct a story of their own and also provides a solid foundation upon which to build a film showcasing their own true particular talents. In this case, the incongruity of inserting Kermit and company into Robert Louis Stevenson's tale is good for laughs, but those laughs don't destroy the story: the final confrontation between the two lead humans, Long John Silver (Tim Curry) and Jim Hawkins (Kevin Bishop), still works.

DRAGONHEART had a great dragon and a more than serviceable story. Unfortunately, it didn't quite integrate its comic and mythic aspirations; though both elements were entertaining, they worked against each other, diminishing what could have been a classic into a good film with some strong points.

A couple of short films deserve a mention. The IMAX film *L5: CITY IN SPACE* made you feel you really were in outer space. 3-D and stereophonic sound (enhanced by a fancy headset containing the polarized lenses and surround-sound speakers—no flimsy red-green

glasses here!) immersed viewers in the visual effects like no film before, creating a truly amazing cinematic experience.

WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE BEST OF AARDMAN ANIMATION provided a glimpse at some of that company's best work. The compilation was highlighted by Nick Park's Oscar-winning *A CLOSE SHAVE*, his third and best film featuring Wallace and Gromit. Within thirty minutes, this film packs more entertainment value than most features; in fact, it probably belongs in my Top Ten, but it's already in the Laserblast Top Ten list, so in consideration of its limited theatrical exposure, I'm giving it this honorable mention.

Two fine reissues also warrant attention. George Franju's *EYES WITHOUT A FACE* briefly resurfaces in L.A. with a fine new print, confirming the 1959 effort as a high point in the history of screen horror. Arriving early in the year, this was the most effective horror film to screen in 1996—a welcome antidote to the misfire of *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*.

Alfred Hitchcock's *VERTIGO* got the restoration treatment—and a brief theatrical run—before hitting home video and laserdisc. The quality of the restoration was underwhelming—the film really didn't look any better than when it was released from the vaults in the early 1980s after being out of circulation for decades—but the film itself withstands the test of time. Despite its imperfections (which detractors emphasize and admirers ignore), the film is a certifiable masterpiece.

ACADEMY OF THE OVERRATED

Because of the continued misguided efforts of the genre press (including this magazine) to pawn it off as a neglected masterpiece, I was tempted to hand out the second annual award in this category (named after a line of dialogue in Woody Allen's *MANHATTAN*) to 1995's *STRANGE DAYS* for the second year running. Upon further reflection, the award goes to *SCREAM*, a competent, well-executed, but ultimately rather unexceptional slasher film that has miraculously gone on to earn critical kudos and audience dollars. *SCREAM* is not a bad movie—actually, it fairly effectively achieves what it sets out to do—nor is it some kind of horror movie renaissance. So, for praise in excess of what it deserved, rather than for lack of quality, it earns this year's honors. □

Although not as successful as some of its 1990s' efforts, Disney scored again with its animated musical version of *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*.



SOUNDTRAX by Randall Larson

A FISTFUL OF GREAT SCORES *The best of old and new releases.*

In film music, 1996 came and went much the way its predecessor did—with a handful of notable genre scores, and a far greater number of reissued, restored, or privately released editions of classic scores from the past. It is this latter category that is perhaps the most interesting, because much of this material hasn't been available. Any year you can get the original score from *THEM!* or *LOST IN SPACE* or *THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF* is a banner year in film music fantastique. All the same, we did have a fair share of new soundtracks released on CD, which I'll begin with as I select my picks for the year's best.

THE BEST OF THE NEW

Once again Jerry Goldsmith tops the list, this time for *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT* (GNP Crescendo GNPD 8052), a defiantly subdued and dignified approach to its subject which works incredibly well. Goldsmith embroiders his score with a sense of grand legendry, his theme seasoned and elegant rather than bombastic and vigorous. The heroism of the *FIRST CONTACT* score is a quiet, reflective one. It's a tribute to the harmonic future envisioned by the entire *STAR TREK* milieu; the new theme is an affecting capitulation of all the adventures that have come before in the *TREK* universe. The music recognizes the stature of its characters and their history, and speaks to this with reverence and admiration.

The CD is one of several "enhanced CD soundtracks" issued in 1996—a new trend started during the year in which the CD's audio program is enhanced by an interactive software program which can be played on a computer's CD-ROM drive. On this one the data program includes interviews with Goldsmith and other *FIRST CONTACT* filmmakers.

David Arnold's music for *INDEPENDENCE DAY* (RCA-BMG 09026-68564-2), like his fine score for 1994's *STARGATE*, is among the year's best. With less than a half-dozen scores under his belt, this British composer continues to emerge as one of the finest orchestral composers of the '90s. *ID4* is rooted in muscular symphonics appropriate to the film's conventional patriotics and easily

suited to the film's large scale. From the score's heroic "everyman" theme to its energetic symphonic rampages, Arnold's alien invasion soundtrack is outstanding on CD, where it can be enjoyed "independent" from its film.

There were few outright fantasy films released in 1996 and fewer whose scores made it onto CD. Two that did are Trevor Jones' score for the Jim Henson Production's telefilm, *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* (RCA-BMG 09026-68475-2) and Randy Edelman's *DRAGONHEART* (MCA MCAD-11449). Jones' classically-styled orchestral score is in his best *DARK CRYSTAL* vein, in keeping with the film's period while lending it a graceful tonality and cadence that held the film's stylishly disjointed sequencing together. With telefilm scores on CD few and far between, it's rewarding to have this pleasant and affecting soundtrack available. Randy Edelman's heartfelt music for *DRAGONHEART* is glorious and captivating, easily among the composer's best works. This is grand film scoring in the best Hollywood tradition, from its gentle heroic theme to its rhythmic, action-scene tonalities. The score is rich in melodious orchestration, tinged occasionally with medieval stylisms but always maintaining a fertile sonorous sensibility.

George Fenton's music for Stephen Frear's oblique look at the *Jekyll & Hyde* story, *MARY REILLY* (Sony Classical SK 62259), is an exquisitely com-

PELLING score beautifully captured on CD. Performed by the venerable London Symphony Orchestra, Fenton's music is mysterious and morose, the musical counterpart to Julia Roberts' poignant performance in delineating the Reilly character. There is lots of spare, plaintive violin, echoing both the sadness of Mary's upbringing and the starkness of *Jekyll and Hyde*. The music is refined and delicate, wisping across the film and its characters like gossamer, exploding into surging intensity in cues like "Mary's Errand" where Fenton transforms his melancholy expressive into a violent orchestral mix of piano, rustling windlike synths, percussion, and plenty of fast-bowed violin.

For good, old-fashioned chills you can't beat Danny Elfman's score for *THE FRIGHTENERS* (MCA MCAD-11469), a rousing broth of orchestra, synths and choir which bubbles over with manic intensity. Over an underlying structure of harpichord, Elfman's doomsaying violin chords rage downwardly, spurred along by higher spirals of violins, bass rhythm notes, string filigrees, harsh choral intonations, and plenty of intricate instrumentation. The score harkens back to Elfman's music to *BEETLEJUICE* and *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, tongue firmly driven into cheek, the result a merry mix of musical mayhem. (Elfman went on to provide similar sci-fi treatment to *MARS ATTACKS!* but the CD didn't make it into the stores till

Harkening back to his early efforts like *BEETLEJUICE*, Danny Elfman provided excellent tongue-in-cheek horror music for *THE FRIGHTENERS*.



Jerry Goldsmith takes top honors for his wonderful understated music for *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT*.

late January '97.)

Finally, this year's Preserved From Oblivion award must go to Intrada, whose release of Christopher Stone's fine scores to a pair of already forgotten movies, *TICKS* and *FIST OF THE NORTH STAR* (Intrada MAF 7069), salvages a duo of notable genre scores too good to fall into neglect. The *FIST* score is vibrant, strenuous music very effectively orchestrated, synths playing nicely off of symphs, built around a sturdy heroic theme. Music for *TICKS* literally scuttles with intricate movement, its theme made up of slow strings growing in intensity over a scurrying carpet of plucked violin and percussion. A twangy acoustic guitar theme creates local color amid the orchestral mysterious. It's by no means the equal to the Goldsmith or Edelman scores, but it's likable enough to earn some notoriety among the year's genre soundtracks.

THE BEST FROM 20,000 VAULTS

1996 continued the desirable trend of releasing previously unavailable scores for the first time, either through the original soundtracks or via faithful re-recordings. Historically, perhaps the most important of these is Rhino's splendid restoration of the original *WIZARD OF OZ* soundtrack (Rhino R2 71964). In addition to the familiar songs, now for the first time Herbert Stothart's magnificent Oscar-winning orchestral score can be heard in all its origi-

nal stereophonic glory in this two-CD booklet deluxe set. Taken from the original recordings, these instrumental cues include extended versions of cues shortened for the film as well as outtakes never before heard. A dozen supplemental cues—demo recordings and unused songs—also appear for the first time. Far more than just a musical, the CD salvages, in beautiful form, one of the late 1930s' finest fantasy scores.

Rivaling it in terms of musical interest is Crescendo's blockbuster 6-CD set, *The Fantasy Worlds of Irwin Allen* (GNP Crescendo GNPD 8044-8049), which provides for the first time the original soundtracks to those chestnuts of televised sci-fi, *LOST IN SPACE*, *THE TIME TUNNEL*, *LAND OF THE GIANTS*, and *VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA*. Containing a plethora of early music by John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Alexander Courage, and others, this release is a dream come true for many film music fans. Williams cut his teeth on the campy lunacy of *LOST IN SPACE* and *LAND OF THE GIANTS*. His music in particular is full of quirky inventiveness. Goldsmith's efforts on *VOYAGE*, along with those of veteran composer Paul Sawtell (*THE FLY*), are equally notable. Including a thick volume of accompanying notes, this expansive collection is a dream come true.

TVT simultaneously issued four new volumes of its nostalgic Television's Greatest Hits series, serving up 260 TV themes taken from the original music tracks. Everything from *THE FLYING NUN* to *THE SIMPSONS*, from kidvid to sitcoms, cop shows to westerns, the CDs also included such notable sci-fi and fantasy themes as: *THE INVADERS*, *NIGHT GALLERY*, *KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER*, *THE NEW TWILIGHT ZONE*, *ALIEN NATION*, and *LOIS AND CLARK*, among its more mainstream fare. More than a "Name That Tune" party game, the CDs have salvaged a treasure trove of terrific TV theme music.

Speaking of treasure troves, 1996 was very good to vintage horror scores, and a number of hitherto unpreserved terror tonalities made their way onto compact disc in fine re-recorded form. In *Monstrous Movie Music* and its sequel, *More Monstrous Movie Music* (MMM-1950 and 1951), producer David Schecter serves up a feast of some of the 1950's best monster music: lengthy suites from things like



FIST OF THE NORTH STAR may have been a forgettable film, but its worthy score by Christopher Stone has been saved from oblivion, along with **TICKS**.

THE MOLE PEOPLE, *THEM!*, *GORG*, *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*, and *TARANTULA*. Fifties horror movies had a musical style all their own; derived from the Universal horror films of the previous two decades, the music was inventive, dynamic, infectious, featuring the early work of Henry Mancini, Bronislaw Kaper, and Angelo Francesco Lavagnino. Restored by Kathleen Mayne and performed by the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Cracow under the baton of Masatoshi Mitsumoto, the renditions are flawless and painstakingly faithful, arranged with the participation of composers Irving Gertz and Herman Stein. Well-illustrated CD booklets offer detailed notes on the films, their scores, and their composers.

Its counterpart across the Atlantic was *Horror!* (Silva SSD 1060), a collection of music from British horror films including first-ever recordings of suites and themes from such classic scores as Clifton Parker's *NIGHT [CURSE] OF THE DEMON*, Humphrey Searle's *THE HAUNTING*, Paul Ferris's *WITCHFINDER GENERAL (THE CONQUEROR WORM)*, and Benjamin Frankel's *CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF*. Conducted by Kenneth Alwyn and performed by the Westminster Philharmonic, the performances of this tremendous monster music are vibrant, faithful, and very welcome.

Silva also unearthed *THE DEVIL RIDES OUT* (Silva SSD 1059), a compilation of six film scores by renowned Hammer composer James Bernard. Somewhat of a follow-up to their 1989 CD *Music From The Hammer Films*,

Silva presents more than an hour's worth of material, from the diabolical frenzy of *THE DEVIL RIDES OUT [THE DEVIL'S BRIDE]* and the spooky sonorities of the Quatermass trilogy to the lilting lyricism of *FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN* and *SCARS OF DRACULA*, and an extended suite from Bernard's personal favorite, *SHE*. The value of the recordings is that the orchestras are larger than Hammer originally could afford, so the sound is fuller than it was on the original soundtracks. Conductors Kenneth Alwyn, Paul Bateman, and Nic Raine worked closely with Bernard on the arrangements to insure correct interpretations. The result is an important and powerful gallery of some of the best horror music of the last 40 years.

Complementing the Silva disc, Bernard's doggedly thrilling music for Hammer's *HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* turned up on an elementary compilation entitled *Sherlock Holmes—Classic Music From 221B Baker Street* (Varese Sarabande VSD-5692), nicely performed by an unnamed orchestra under the baton of Lanny Meyers. The CD contains much music hitherto unavailable, including those wonderfully melodramatic Basil Rathbone scores by Cyril Mockridge and Frank Skinner, and Bernard's elegantly cataclysmic Hammer music.

Also premiering in 1996 was the first-ever recording of one of fantasy's finest film scores, Georges Auric's music for Jean Cocteau's 1946 French version of *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* (Marco Polo 8.223765). Cocteau's film is a classic of film fantasy, and

its score, by respected French composer George Auric, who scored most of Cocteau's films of this period, is sumptuously classical, enhanced by wordless chorus. It takes on an almost balletic quality, equally as impressionistic as Cocteau's direction and the marvelous set design of Christian Berard. Told by the director to avoid a close association of image and music, Auric's composed a score that embodied the delicate, haunting essence of Cocteau's exquisite fairy tale utilizing orchestra and choir. Much of the score is quiet and static, with nonmoving figures and chords emphasizing the uniqueness of the setting and the events. This contrasts nicely with those moments when Auric lets loose with audible energy. The CD contains the complete score—including those cues deleted from either or both the American and French prints of the film. A 16-page CD booklet is included with plenty of b/w photos and notes on the film, its music, and its composer.

Other notable vintage scores appearing on CD for the first time last year included a six-minute segment of Franz Waxman's music for Tod Browning's 1936 *THE DEVIL DOLL* on *Legends of Hollywood: Franz Waxman Vol. 4* (Varese Sarabande VSD-5713, Queensland Symphony), Les Baxter's *CRY OF THE BANSHEE* and *EDGAR ALLEN POE SUITE* coupled with John Cacavas's *HORROR EXPRESS* (Citadel STC 77107) and Tristram Cary's modernistic score for Hammer's *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT* (*The Film Music of Tristram Cary, Vol. 1, Cloud Nine CNS 5009*, original soundtrack).

Telarc dazzled us with a stunning audiophile tribute to 30 years of *Star Trek*, in *Symphonic Star Trek* (Telarc D-80383, Erich Kunzel, Cincinnati Pops Orchestra), an aural experience featuring excerpts from all of the *Trek* TV series and films, enhanced by unobtrusive sound effects cues that give one's stereo system a workout.

What can we expect for 1997? Probably more of the same. A new set of *STAR WARS* soundtracks to accompany the enhanced rerelease of the trilogy. More compilations—perhaps a third *Monstrous Movie Music* CD and a new Hammer collection; more composer promo albums (now you see 'em, now you don't).

And, perhaps, even a handful of great new scores. □

DTV

by John Thonen

THE BEST OF YEARS, THE WORST OF YEARS

Never has the gap between good and bad loomed so wide.

It was the best of years; it was the worst of years. OK, maybe Dickens is a little too melodramatic for a column on 1996's Direct To Video (DTV) releases. Still, the highs and lows of the year's best and worst DTV have never before been so extreme. It's more than a little depressing that some of the films listed here couldn't garner a decent theatrical release. On the other hand, that very fact means some categories boast the best films covered since this column began 4 years ago. So, here they are: the DTV offerings worth searching for, along with the ones guaranteed to develop calluses on your 'fast-forward scan finger.'

BEST SCIENCE FICTION FILM

While LIFEFORM's video box makes the film sound like any of a dozen other action-oriented, monster on the loose titles, there is more going on than a jaded DTV viewer might expect. The film's clever premise starts with the return of a long missing NASA Mars probe. The ship has been modified, by unknown forces, to transport an alien embryo. The embryo develops rapidly, and the research station and its small staff are quarantined.

The alien's purpose and its nature are never clearly defined, keeping the viewer, unsure of what might happen. Clearly the creature is not an INDEPENDENCE DAY-style invader, but neither is it a benevolent DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL-type visitor. It is this ambivalence that maintains the film's tension and which makes it unique. Effects are kept to a minimum, with most of the film offering only glimpses of the creature. However when finally viewed in full, co-producer/makeup wiz Tony Gardner (TOMMYKNOCKERS) manages to come up with quite a unique creation. It's one of the most original aliens ever to grace the screen.

Writer-director [first name?] Barker delivers the sci-fi action and suspense the box-blurbs promise, but he also manages to develop his story logically, through believable characters, notably the scientists who, instead of being the expected handsome researcher and sexy biologist, are average looking, middle-aged people. Baker maintains an uncommon level of realism while dispensing the fantastic. It's a refreshing change from most DTV sci-fi, as is most of the rest of the film.

WORST SCIENCE FICTION FILM

As evidenced by the youthful appearance of star Brenda Bakke (at least 10 years younger than in UNDER SEIGE 2), GUNHEAD, a Japanese produced, manga-styled tale, has spent some time on the shelf. Now, belatedly released, it's delayed entry becomes understandable. A rousing adventure could have been fashioned from the film's reluctant pairing of a band of techno-thieves and a female Texas ranger in a raid on a computer-controlled



Michael York and Richard Belzer elevate Roger Corman's DTV remake of NOT OF THIS EARTH into a winner.

fortress. Instead, most of the group are quickly killed, and the survivors are paired with a couple of grating techno-nerd kids to reassemble the title machine, a huge war-bot.

Your DTV rental dollar gets you only an endless flow of bad dialogue, dreadful acting and mediocre effects in a film so lifeless that a robot cast and director would have made little difference in the final results.

BEST HORROR FILM

MUTE WITNESS, writer-Director Anthony Waller's debut effort is 1996's best DTV horror-thriller. The film's simple premise finds Billie Hughes, a mute makeup effects artist, working on an American "slasher" film in the former USSR. After witnessing the filming of a real life "snuff" film, she ends up on the run from the killers. With little more set up than that, Waller proceeds to unfold a taut and often dazzling tour de force of suspense, lightened now and then by dark-tinged humor.

Waller never lets us lose track of the human aspect of his story, presenting his characters as people, not merely as a filmmaker's automatons. The viewer cares about Billy, and even the briefly seen snuff-film victim is presented with a touch of humanity that makes her death uncomfortable to watch instead of titillating.

It is impossible to understand why a film of this caliber received only a minimal theatrical release, while the dreadful HELLRAISER and HALLOWEEN sequels managed wide-release in over a thousand theaters. For a DTV offering,

the film did earn considerable critical attention which allowed Waller to land the upcoming AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS.

WORST HORROR FILM

1996 finds that DTV has virtually abandoned the horror genre. One refuge has been A-PIX Home Video. While the support for horror is appreciated, most of their films are not. Case in point: THE WHISPERING. A balding, paunch-bellied Lief Garrett, far from his teen idol days, toplines this exercise in tedium. The story deals with an insurance investigator looking into a string of suicides that seem to have been motivated by an androgynous phantom.

There is not one moment here that generates even a modicum of suspense. The storyline becomes increasingly more convoluted as the viewer's interest is rapidly turning to ennui. This is the second year in a row that an A-PIX release has claimed the dis-honors in this category. Watch this spot to see if they go three for three in '97.

BEST SEQUEL

CHILDREN OF THE CORN IV: THE GATHERING is a name-only follow-up to last year's best sequel winner: COTC 3: URBAN HARVEST. While neither

will ever be heralded as the second coming of horror, the series has been unusual in starting out dismally and then getting better with each subsequent offering. This time out no thread is maintained to the earlier films. In lieu of the earlier malefic deity that walked between the rows of corn, we are here offered the spirit of a murdered child, Josiah. Abandoned by his unwed mother and raised to be a youthful evangelistic preacher by cruel and opportunistic step-parents, he has returned to seek vengeance on the adults of a small town.

While the film over-relies on shock-awakening dream sequences and gory deaths via sharp implements. The most unusual aspect of the film is its lead characters, whom we actually come to care about.

WORST SEQUEL

NEMESIS 3: TIME LAPSE, the worst DTV sequel for '96 is also a follow-up to last year's worst sequel, NEMESIS 2. That this sequel maintains the brain-dead qualities of its predecessor isn't all that surprising since director Albert Pyun filmed them back to back. This one manages a little of the goofy charm that has salvaged some of the prolific Pyun's other offerings, and the action sequences and effects are more plentiful and better staged than in #2, but nothing can hide just how dumb this is. Closing previews threaten yet another entry in the unwanted series. Care to make any predictions on 1997's loser in this category?

BEST CHARLES BAND/ ROGER CORMAN FILM

In past years this section has been the exclusive domain of DTV godfather Charles Band. 1995 saw the near demise of his Full Moon production operation and a severe curtailing of his releases. The drop in quantity necessitated the expansion of the category. The only other presence in the DTV pantheon equal to that of Band's is exploitation guru Roger Corman, making him the obvious addition to the category.

One of the oddest, and least satisfying, methods Corman has been using of late is doing remakes of his own films. Most of them are dreadful; however, *NOT OF THIS EARTH*, the latest version of the venerable 1957 trash classic (already remade by Corman in '88), is a happy exception.

The remake's greatest strength lies in its casting. While most former name performers would give a perfunctory turn at best in a low budget effort such as this, Michael York gives it his all as the title presence. He offers a solid performance, full of odd speech cadences and stilted body movements that bring Jeff Bridge's work in *STARMAN* to mind. Elizabeth Barondes is far more satisfying in the female lead than the more pulchritudinous Traci Lords was in '88, and Richard Belzer is a delight as the alien's unwitting Renfield. Only the always bland Parker Stevenson disappoints as Barondes' policeman boyfriend.

The film is further bolstered by some imaginative effects, including a nifty flying manta-ray creature, and a sometimes humorous, but never spoofy, script. One can only wish that all of Corman's remakes, or even his original productions, were as enjoyable as this.

WORST CHARLES BAND/ ROGER CORMAN FILM

CAGED HEAT 3000 does nothing to improve the ignominious reputation of the *Women In Prison* genre. Lacking even the most rudimentary aspects of storytelling or characterization it offers instead, showers, stabbings, rapes, fights and several torture sequences that delve deeply enough into B&D/S&M imagery as to verge on the pornographic.

Corman—who should hang his head low for this one—needs to package this release with accompanying bulk eraser and a bar of soap. That way viewers could first

continued on page 61

LASERBLAST

by Dennis Fischer

Despite the sometimes lackluster cinematic offerings of 1995, '96 was another banner year for laserdisc releases with a few promising new trends. At once the most encouraging and the most frustrating of the trends has been the proliferation of laserdisc special editions, which provide extensive background information on the making of various classic films. Universal's "Signature Collection" which released special editions of *E.T.*, *FIELD OF DREAMS*, and *TREMORS* last year (with 12 *MONKEYS*, *DRAGONHEART*, *PSYCHO*, and Carpenter's *THE THING* slated for this year) makes a bid for rivaling Criterion's, Fox's and MGM's special edition packages, though the Universal releases will typically not have accompanying commentary on an analog track, preferring to put together made-for-disc documentaries. What's especially frustrating is affording to keep up with all the new material—bonus editions typically run \$100-125, as opposed to \$40 for film only versions.

Still, the top laser release of 1995 was Criterion's long-delayed *BRAZIL* box set, which features the entire European cut of the film in letterboxed CAV format, plus two one-hour documentaries (one on the making of the film, the other on the battle with Sid Sheinberg over releasing it) and the entirety of the infamous television version (with commentary) on CLV sides.

Though how often one would want to view the awful, re-cut and re-scored television version is open to question. One interesting feature it does contain is an alternate version of the scene between Sam Lowery (Jonathan Pryce) and his best friend Jack the Torturer (Michael Palin). Meanwhile, the print of *BRAZIL* is brilliant, transferred with all colors and details of Gilliam's intricate design intact. This print of the film contains two scenes omitted from the American release (one covering how prisoners are charged for their interrogation; the other establishing Jill's demise when Sam was captured). One of the biggest bonuses is Gilliam's running commentary defending his artistic choices, which enhances one's appreciation of this intricate and unique science fantasy.

2. *BABE* (Universal/MCA) de-

1996: THE SPECIAL EDITION

A banner year for discs with extras.



Criterion's long-delayed, extravagant box set of Terry Gilliam's *BRAZIL* (starring Jonathan Pryce, above) is the best laserdisc release of 1996.

served its Best Picture nomination (and won for Best Special Effects). Not your standard issue kids' talking pig picture, George (MAD MAX) Miller and Chris Noonan's script creates a series of lively barnyard characters, with the butcher's knife ever near to keep things from getting too sentimental. The film is a parable about developing your talents in new areas at the risk of looking foolish—and it works. Kudos to director Noonan for what must have been his incredible patience.

3. *TOY STORY* (Disney/Image), the first feature length all computer-animated fantasy is also a timeless joy, thanks to its sure sense of characterization and invention. Director John Lasseter earned a special achievement Academy Award for his work on this wonderfully inventive tale of rivalry and friendship. It is letterboxed in Lasseter's chosen aspect ratio of 1.77 on both the bargain priced single disc, or the deluxe edition with behind-the-scenes material.

4. *A GRAND DAY OUT & THE WRONG TROUSERS* (CBS Fox/BBC Video) are the two Academy Award nominated Nick Park short subjects (the latter a winner), each presented on a side in CAV.

These cunningly constructed science fiction comedies featuring the characters of Wallace and Grommit are, frame-for-frame, some of the cleverest cinematic work since *A NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. The first deals with a trip to the moon, where they encounter a peculiar lifeform. The latter features wall-walking techno-trousers and a spot-on Hitchcock pastiche, and both are must-sees. (See feature story on Park in CFQ 28:1).

5. *MGM HORROR CLASSICS* (MGM/UA) Last year saw MGM's best '30s horror films at last on disc, and they are a true must-have. At last, the missing footage cut from the cassette release of *THE MASK OF FU MANCHU* is restored, albeit in rougher form than the rest of the film. (Racially offensive material referring to whites was cut, while Asian insults had been left intact). This features on of Karloff's more amusingly sinister characterizations as the dread Dr. Fu Manchu. Peter Lorre gives an equally brilliant performance as Dr. Goggol in *MAD LOVE*, based on "The Hands of Orlac," and beautifully photographed by Gregg Toland. *THE DEVIL-DOLL* is Tod Browning's most underrated film as Lionel Barrymore plays an escaped convict

1996 IN REVIEW

who uses a scientist's shrinking machine to wreak revenge. The special effects hold up very well and have their own special quality. The most disappointing film of the bunch is *MARK OF THE VAMPIRE*, an atmospheric but tensionless mystery with some beautifully outré shots of Lugosi and Carol Borland. Lugosi has almost no dialogue in the film, so a terrific bonus is that he gets to narrate the entire trailer for the film which is also included. The only caveat is that the films' soundtracks have not been digitally cleaned of hiss and roughness.

6. THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR (Tai Seng Video) deserves its reputation as a Hong Kong fantasy classic. Another great trend of '96 is the release of good-looking domestic versions of what were hard-to-find, expensive Asian import titles, and this is one of the very best. Directed by Ronny Yu the film is based on a novel by Leung Yu-sang. It's the story of a martial arts master (Leslie Cheung) who falls in love with a warrior woman (Brigitte Lin), who can rip people apart with her whip and was raised by wolves. The woman, christened Ni-chang by her lover, seeks to divide herself from a cult headed by Chi Wu-shuang, an evil, magical Siamese twin brother-and-sister. Tai Seng has spread the film to three sides, presenting the climax in CAV and gives the film better framing, a better transfer, adds a brief "making of" snippet as well as several different trailers.

7. THE MYSTERY OF RAMPO (Evergreen Entertainment/Image) is on the the most elegant and sensual fantasies ever to hit the screen. Director Kazuyoshi Okuyama in-



BABE, CFQ's pick for Best Film of 1995, is now one of the best discs of 1996.

geniously incorporates the form of an old-fashioned night at the movies, presenting a cartoon, a brief newsreel, a bit of chapterplay, and a feature. The feature concerns real-life Japanese mystery writer Edogawa Rampo, who begins to wonder where fantasy leaves off and reality begins when he meets what appears to be the woman from a story he has been writing in real life. This transfer captures the stunningly beautiful photography by Yasushi Sasaki as well as the lush score by Akimasa Kawashima. Filled with wonderful imagery and bizarre characters, the film is intriguingly

ambiguous, terrifically ambitious, and more demanding than anything we can expect from one of today's major American film studios.

8. GOLDENEYE (MGM/UA) is neither the best nor the worst of the Bond films, but Pierce Brosnan makes a credible Bond. It makes for a terrific and relatively low-priced laser package (thereby beating out the Special CAV version of *THUNDERBALL* with its vastly improved transfer). The film has a science-fictional premise about activating a devastating electromagnetic pulse, and there are some memorable stunt scenes. The laser features audio commentary by director Marin Campbell and producer Michael G. Wilson, over 15 trailers and television spots, the *WORLD OF 007* special with highlights from the entire series, plus Tina Turner's music video and an original featurette.

9. DAWN OF THE DEAD (Elite) just edges out Elite's deluxe *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* package because for the first time in the U.S. it offers George Romero's full 142 minute director's cut—letterboxed to boot—transferred from the original 35mm CRI, unlike its past laser incarnations. A not-so-subtle satire on mass consumerism, this

is still one of the best splatter movies ever made.

10. THE OLD DARK HOUSE (Kino/Image) finally makes the jump to laser, in a transfer that is clearer than any previous video version thanks to a print provided by Scott MacQueen. It features two commentaries, one by James Whale expert James Curtis, and another by lead actress Gloria Stuart, plus a filmed interview with Curtis Harrington about his rescuing the film from near oblivion. The second side is in CAV, and features production stills and a lobby card filmography of Whale's career. A terrific cast combines to create an oddball story of wet travelers, demented denizens, and dry wit. This is one classic that seems to improve every time one sees it, inviting re-viewing.

Brevity demands the omission of many other worthy titles, including Fox's deluxe edition of *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN* with omitted footage and Lumivision's terrific widescreen transfer of *A BOY AND HIS DOG* among others.

New trends starting in '97 include the introduction of DVD (digital video discs), the release of the competing Digital Surround system which will try to best Dolby Digital's new hold on the laserdisc market, plus lots of promising new titles to be released. Stay tuned. □

Oscar-winning short subjects *THE WRONG TROUSERS* and *A GRAND DAY OUT* were packaged on disc.



The antics of Buzz and Woody appeared in a wonderful letter-boxed version of *TOY STORY*, on both a bargain-priced disc and a deluxe edition.



Two divine comedies show little inspiration

MICHAEL

Turner Pictures presents an Alphaville Production of a Nora Ephron film. Directed by Nora Ephron. Executive producers: Delia Ephron, Jonathan D. Krane. Produced by Sean Daniel, Nora Ephron, James Jacks. Director of photography: John Lindley. Editor: Geraldine Peroni. Production Designer: Dan Davis. Music by Randy Newman. Screenplay by Nora Ephron, Delia Ephron, Pete Dexter & Jim Quinlan, based on a story by Pete Dexter & Jim Quinlan. 12/96, 106 mins. PG.

Michael.....	John Travolta
Dorothy Winters.....	Andie MacDowell
Frank Quinlan.....	William Hurt
Vartan Malt.....	Bob Hoskins
Huey Driscoll.....	Robert Pastorelli
Pansy Milbank.....	Jean Stapleton
Judge Esther Newberg.....	Teri Garr
Bruce Craddock.....	Wallace Langham
Anita.....	Joey Lauren Adams
Bride.....	Carla Gugino
Groom.....	Tom Hodges

by Steve Biodrowski

Nora Ephron has got to be one of the most erratic talents on the Earth. After early successes (writing *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*, writing and directing *SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE*), she could turn around and bomb at the box-office with her Christmas comedy, *MIXED NUTS*. In the meantime, she could collaborate on an as-yet unproduced howler of a screenplay, *HIGGINS AND BEACH*, in which the entire Korean War serves merely as a backdrop for an affair between two reporters. (I think we're supposed to feel glad that all those soldiers didn't die for nothing; after all, their sacrifice made this wonderful romance possible.)

Well, that script looked like it was permanently shelved, but after the boxoffice success of *MICHAEL*, however undeserved, it has already been dusted off as Ephron's next directorial project—heaven help us. It just goes to show that talent isn't the barometer of choice in Hollywood—money is.

There is little good that one could possibly say about *MICHAEL*. The script, which was rewritten by Ephron and her sister, betrays its multiple authors, including a variety of mixed elements that never gel into a whole film.

The first problem is with the titular character. "He's an angel but no saint," the ads proclaim. Apparently, the early drafts of the script intended to portray Michael as a fallen angel; all that's left of that is some boorish behavior: he smokes, he drinks, he screws around. But none of that carries any weight; in fact, it is pretty much overlooked by the plot,

which just trots this behavior out for the sake of a few cheap laughs.

Fortunately for Ephron, she had the benefit of John Travolta in the lead. Since *PULP FICTION*, the actor has been on such a hot streak that everything he touches turns to boxoffice gold. In this case, the film exploits his established persona (once again he gets to dance on screen) to make the character come across as charming instead of merely obnoxious.

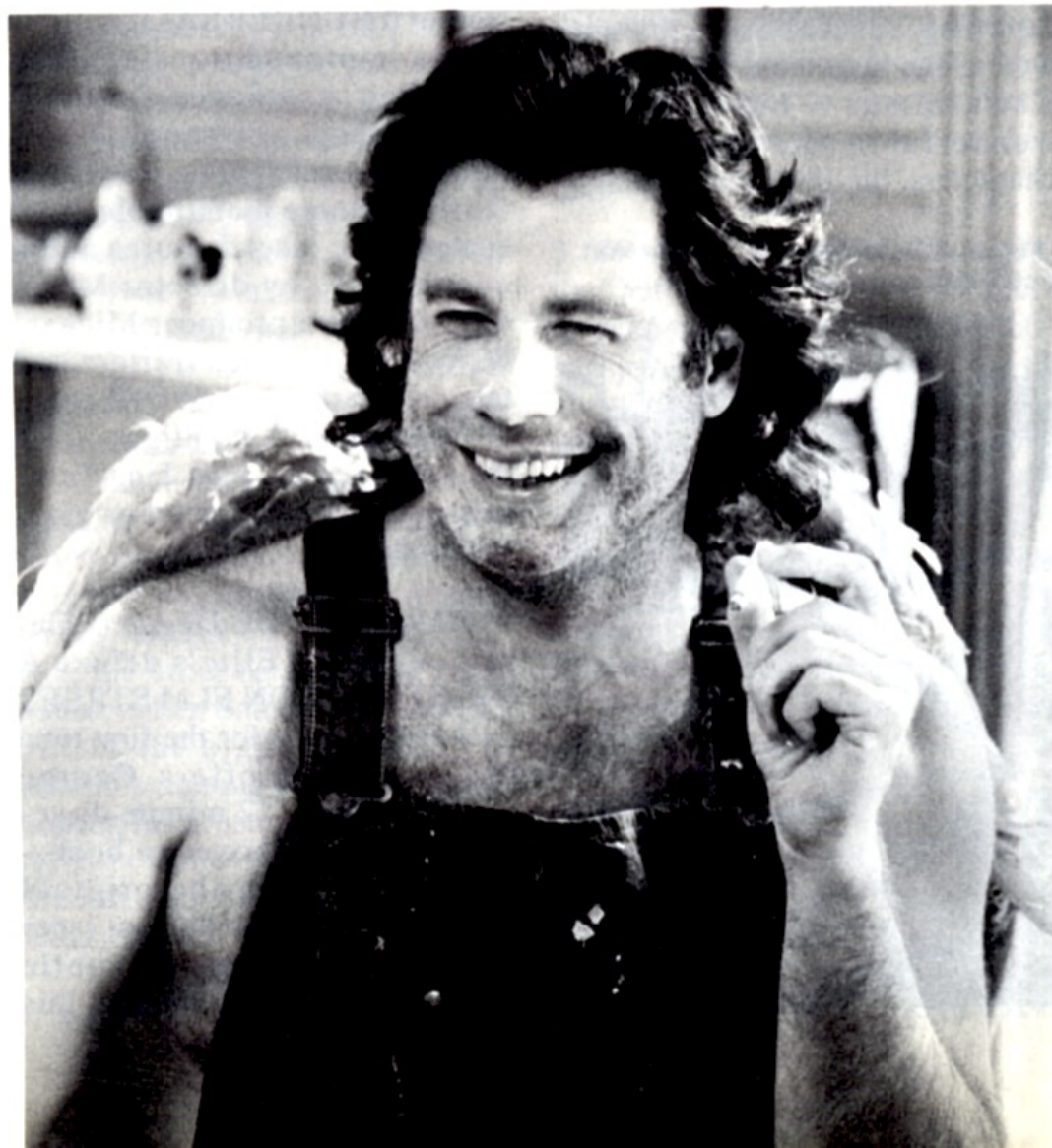
And he is supposed to be charming. All his flaws are just window dressing, a gimmick to help sell the film to audiences too jaded or cynical to accept a more angelic type of angel. But ultimately, Michael's intentions turn out to be divine—or at least well-meaning. Apparently, the whole point of the plot is that he has come to Earth to help William Hurt's cynical reporter learn to fall in love with Andie MacDowell. Pardon me if I don't get all choked up about this, but frankly, anybody so stupid that he *needs* help falling in love with MacDowell probably doesn't *deserve* that help.

This really isn't enough of a story to fill up a feature, so Ephron and company have padded out the script by turning it into a road movie. Michael, despite his wings,

prefers not to fly (in an airplane, that is), so the tabloid reporters who have come to exploit him are forced to drive him back to their boss to prove that they've found a real angel. This allows the writers to toss in various barroom scenes and a confrontation with a bull ("Battle!" cries Michael with enthusiasm, apparently nostalgic for the old days of wrestling Lucifer out of Heaven).

Apparently, there is also some kind of unwritten rule that this kind of uplifting film must kill off and resurrect an animal (in this case a dog). That fact that Michael could easily have prevented the dog from being run over in the first place doesn't phase Ephron, nor are we supposed to notice. Worse, we are left to ponder (not that many viewers have) why Michael chooses to prove his powers by resurrecting a pooch instead of Pansy Milbank (Jean Stapleton), who croaks in the opening reel (dogs apparently carry more sentimental value than decrepit old ladies). This kind of cheap manipulation tugs audience heartstrings, but it is not good filmmaking. *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*, the season's other angel fantasy, may not have been inspired, but it deserved more attention than this muddled effort. □

John Travolta's star turn as a not-very-angelic angel helped the misfired *MICHAEL* to become a rather undeserving holiday hit.



Stars Whitney Houston and Denzel Washington lend their charisma to *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*.

THE PREACHER'S WIFE

Directed by Penny Marshall. Touchstone Pictures. 12/96, 124 mins. PG. With: Whitney Houston, Denzel Washington, Courtney B. Vance.

Remakes almost seem to be "asking for it" from critics. This is why it would be easy to be cynical about *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*. After all, the film is an update of a well-known and beloved classic, *THE BISHOP'S WIFE*, but the new version doesn't over-contemporize, nor does it repeat, the original. Instead, *THE PREACHER'S WIFE* uses the original story as a starting point, infusing it with enough new elements, which allows it to avoid too many comparisons and emerge as a very appealing effort.

What helps this story of an angel sent down to Earth to assist a troubled pastor is the conviction of the three major leads. Denzel Washington brings his usual charm to the role of angel Dudley, but also displays a great gift for sharp comic timing, especially in the scenes in which the character is awestruck by such small, earthly pleasures as pizza and hot dogs.

Of course, Whitney Houston can sing with the same ease many apply to breathing, but for someone who has only starred in a handful of films, she is very natural in front of the camera, showing a vulnerable side in *THE PREACHER'S WIFE* and bringing dimension to what could have been a thankless, one-note role.

Most surprising of all is Courtney B. Vance as the put-upon preacher. In light of his high-caliber co-stars, Vance could have easily underplayed his role, but instead inhabits the character strongly, in a way so real that it seems to ground the entire film.

Adding to this "grounding" is the subtle technique of director Penny Marshall. Devoid of flashy, computer generated visual effects (a very welcome change), Marshall employs the same technique she used in *BIG*, making *THE PREACHER'S WIFE* a unique contemporary fantasy, with an infectious, upbeat tone that makes the film hard to dislike. ●● Mike Lyons

Familiar formula yields exciting results

THE RELIC

A Paramount release in association with Cloud Nine Entertainment, of a Pacific Western production. Directed by Peter Hyams. Produced by Sam Mercer & Gale Anne Hurd. Executive producers: Gary Levinsohn & Mark Gordon. Director of photography: Peter Hyams. Editor: Steven Kemper. Production designer: Philip Harrison. Art director: Eric Orborn, James Murakani. Costume designer: Dan Lester. Sound: Gene S. Cantamessa. Creature effects: Stan Winston. Visual effects produced by VIFX. Visual effects supervisor: Gregory L. McMurray. Screenplay by Andy Jones, John Raffo, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, based on the novel by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child.

Dr. Margo Green.....Penelope Ann Miller
Lt. Vincent D'Agosta.....Tom Sizemore
Dr. Ann Cuthbert.....Linda Hunt
Dr. Albert Frock.....James Whitmore
Detective Hollingsworth.....Clayton Rohner
Greg Lee.....Chi Muoi Lo
Parkinson.....Thomas Ryan
Mayor Owen.....Robert Lesser
John Whitney.....Lewis Van Bergen

by Steve Biodrowski

THE RELIC goes to show that you don't have to be original to be good. Here is a film that combines a series of familiar elements, yet manages to be entertaining simply by virtue of the competent execution that occasionally ascends to the level of outright excitement. The story is not some kind of inspired re-thinking of the horror genre; instead, it efficiently re-assembles the *de rigueur* elements into a familiar structure in the hope of winning audience good will.

Along the way, it also provides a decent amount of characterization for actors playing familiar roles (Tom Sizemore as the tough detective, Penelope Ann Miller as the beautiful lady scientist). One of the fun things about the movie is the way it presents us with familiar cliches and then tries to overturn them into something original—

while actually only giving us a more recent cliché. For example, Miller's "evolutionary biologist" suffers the requisite shocks, and screams a lot, and even undergoes a weird form of sexual harassment (in one of the more memorable images, the monster's tongue caresses her in disgusting close-up). But in the end, it is she who gathers her courage and defeats the beast. It's a nice pop-feminist moment, but it's also just as much a piece of formula at this date as the screaming damsel (and producer Gale Ann Hurd would know this, having produced THE TERMINATOR). None of this should be construed as defeating the entertainment value of the film, which is operating on a broad enough level to encompass these broad strokes—the filmmakers know we haven't come to the theatre for subtleties.

On the most basic level of visceral thrills, the film starts slowly and attempts to build its momentum gradually. The process is mitigated slightly because the plot points are familiar enough that it is easy for genre-trained audiences to be one step ahead; on the other hand, these scenes are well structured enough that they do deliver the impact necessary to carry viewers toward the climax.

Midway through, any reservations about the film's effectiveness are overcome when the intrusion of a victim's body into a museum fund raiser ignites a full-scale race for the exits, which is thwarted by



Tom Sizemore's Detective Vincent D'Agosta examines a primitive statue of a mythical monster, the Cathoga, that may hold a key to a series of deaths.

sabotaged security systems automatically locking down doors. The ensuing chaos captures a genuinely frightening sense of scared-shitless panic; instead of stuntmen gracefully leaping in painless slow-motion swan dives, it really looks like someone could get hurt.

From that point on the film kicks into overdrive and never lets up. With its heroes locked inside the structure while police ineffectually swarm around the exterior, the film starts to resemble director Peter Hyams' previous effort, SUDDEN DEATH, except with a monster instead of terrorists.

But what a monster! The "Cathoga" (a genetically mutated hybrid) is wonderful combination of suggestion, sound effects, prosthetics for close ups, and computer imagery for full-scale running. Although the film overdoes the decapitation scenes to the point that they lose their shock effectiveness, there are many other great moments guaranteed to amaze, as when the beast performs a flying leap to capture a hapless SWAT agent dangling on a rope, or methodically uses his claws to ascend a vertical wall.

These key visual moments do not stand out from the scenes surrounding them. Hyams, aided by his production designers, has done a good job of creating an environment in which the presence of this monster is believable. An exhibit

on superstition, many narrow hallways, and some flooded tunnels provide ample shadows in which the monster can be lurking, and Hyams has managed to stage the action with enough suspense and tension so that even when the effects occasionally betray their CGI origin, the audience is not wont to pick at the imperfections.

Actually, the biggest imperfection to be overlooked is not the effects, but the editing. In an effort to compress the time between the beast's attacks, the geography of the museum becomes muddled to the point where it almost appears as if there must be two monsters, because one could not possibly be getting around that fast. Luckily, by this time, viewers have become too locked into the accelerating narrative to sit back and examine this inconsistency.

The actors do their best not to play second fiddle to the effects. Their little quirks (D'Agosta's superstition, which dovetails with the museum exhibit *and* the monster) are never brought to any particular dramatic resolution, but they do make the characters more involving. The casting of James Whitmore is also a nice touch. Though not an actor associated with monster-on-the-loose movies, he did appear in one of the best, THEM!, over 40 years ago. THE RELIC may not go on to become such a beloved classic, but it is a worthy successor. □

In the film's fiery climax, Dr. Margo Green (Penelope Ann Miller) outruns the blast of an explosion she has ignited to destroy the monster.



Subversive satire masquerading as a studio blockbuster

MARS ATTACKS!

A Warner Bros. release, produced by Tim Burton and Larry Franco. Directed by Tim Burton. Written by Jonathan Gems, based on *Mars Attacks!* by Topps. Photography (widescreen, color) by Peter Suschitzky. Music by Danny Elfman. Production Design by Wynn Thomas; supervising art director, James Hegedus; art direction, John Dexter; set design, Richard Berger; set decoration, Nancy Haigh. Costume design, Colleen Atwood. Sound (Dolby/DTS/SDDS) by Dennis Maitland, Sr.; sound design, Randy Thom. Visual effects supervisors: James Mitchell, Michael Fink, David Andrews; special effects supervisor, Michael Lantieri; Martian visual effects and animation by Industrial Light & Magic; Martian character and spacesuit design, Mackinnon & Saunders Ltd; saucer and cataclysm visual effects by Warner Digital Studios. Stunt coordinator, Joe Dunne. Associate producers, Paul Deason, Mark S. Miller; assistant director, Tom Mack. Casting, Victoria Thomas, Jeanne McCarthy, Matthew Barry. 103 minutes. Rated PG-13.

President Dale, Art Land.....Jack Nicholson
 Marsha Dale.....Glenn Close
 Barbara Land.....Annette Bening
 Donald Kessler.....Pierce Brosnan
 Rude Gambler.....Danny DeVito
 Jerry Ross.....Martin Short
 Nathalie Lake.....Sarah Jessica Parker
 Jason Stone.....Michael J. Fox
 General Decker.....Rod Steiger
 General Casey.....Paul Winfield
 Himself.....Tom Jones
 Richie Norris.....Lucas Haas
 Taffy Dale.....Natalie Portman
 Byron Williams.....Jim Brown
 Louise Williams.....Pam Grier
 Martian Girl.....Lisa Marie
 Grandma Norris.....Sylvia Sidney
 Glenn Norris.....Joe Don Baker
 Sharona.....Christina Applegate

by Steve Biodrowski

Leave it to Tim Burton to tune in to the one great unspoken fact about disaster pictures, alien invasion pictures, and other assorted forms of cinematic mayhem: that the devastation is, in a vicarious way, fun. His film of *MARS ATTACKS!* does not work on the visceral level of suspense—i.e., how will noble humanity regroup, defeat the evil aliens, and preserve our way of life—not to mention our precious bodily fluids. Instead, the entertainment value comes from cheerfully watching Earth



Some of the Martian invaders get their brains blown to pieces, one of many cheerfully graphic moments in the film.

blasted to bits, which the film more or less endorses (as one friend said upon leaving a screening, “That film make a good argument for the extinction of the human race, because all the characters are assholes who get what they deserve”).

This may be taking things a little too far. Burton and writer Jonathan Gems do not insist that all of humanity deserves to perish; rather, it is the status quo that needs to go. The disenfranchised and the disempowered are the only characters who garner any kind of sympathy, and the inside joke of the plot is that, for all the demoli-

tion and insanity, this is one scenario in which the meek really shall inherit the Earth.

A useful point of comparison is John Milius’ *RED DAWN*, surely one of the most bizarre films of the ’80s. Although the film was treated as some kind of expression of right-wing paranoia at the time, both the detractors and its supporters missed the real flaw: the film’s own raging hypocrisy. Milius, in his simple-minded way, may have treated the Russians as evil invaders hell-bent on destroying America as we know it, but ultimately he endorsed the invasion—or at least the results of the invasion.

In Milius’ view, the power structure (as we see it in the microcosm the film presents) was run by wimps who deserved to be driven out. Remember the scene wherein the high school’s student president, after the initial attack, calls for a vote, and he is angrily shouted down by a character whom Milius obviously supports, who then basically takes over? Milius is showing us that the old power structure is gone, allowing his favored characters to assume their rightful place as leaders.

Thus, the film on a surface level condemns the invasion; while pretending to express a patriotic view, however, it revels in the results. This is hypocrisy. Milius didn’t have the nerve to openly call for the overthrow of the Unit-

ed States government, so he constructed a fantasy in which someone else did it for him, allowing him to put his on-screen identification figures in charge.

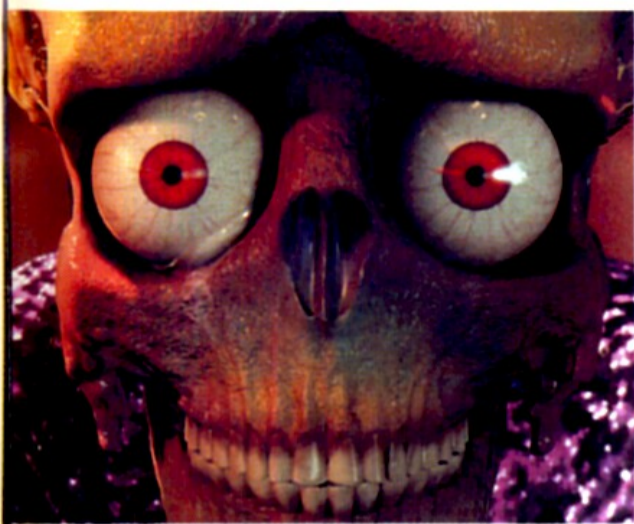
MARS ATTACKS!, on the other hand, is more open about its intentions. The invaders this time are not so much evil as amoral. They just want to have fun; the only problem is that the fun is all at our expense. The characters who are destroyed are in various ways self-serving or at the very least self-obsessed, who are not concerned with the global ramifications of what is happening so much as with how it will affect them personally. For example, Jack Nicholson’s entrepreneur and Danny DeVito’s lawyer both think they can make money off it; the President (Nicholson again) thinks it will earn him votes.

Also, conventional notions of heroism and patriotism are overturned: one character is blasted while trying to surrender; a photograph of him trying to save himself by handing over the U.S. flag is misinterpreted as an attempt to save Old Glory. Meanwhile, his younger brother (who gets no respect from his family) turns out to be the real hero, abandoning thoughts of personal safety to rescue his grandmother.

These latter two characters are among the film’s few survivors, and it is clear that the film supports them precisely because they

In the privacy of their vessel, the Martians peruse an Earthling magazine centerfold; the characters are like rude, demented children run amok.





Confronted by the President's "Can't we all get along" speech, the Martian ambassador sheds a crocodile tear.

are pretty much abandoned by society at large; they are perpetual outsiders, as Burton considered himself to be when he was younger. This state of being alienated from society saves them and the others (an alcoholic New Ager, a retired boxer who has found Allah) from sharing in the fate of society. (As Paul Winfield said of the script, "The high are brought low, and the low are brought high.")

All of which is a very strange formula to find in an alleged big studio blockbuster. For all its high-tech effects, sets, costuming, and locations, *MARS ATTACKS!* remains independent in spirit, the identifiable work of an artist with a recognizable vision. That vision does not necessarily sustain Burton throughout the film (which is not always as funny as it means to be), but it does lend some personality to the proceedings in unexpected ways.

One good example is the casting. The very idea of Jack Nicholson as the President tips us off that all is not completely on the straight and narrow with this film. The further inclusion of an all-star supporting cast increases the humor potential, since the basic work of the script is to kill the characters off like targets in a shooting gallery. Seeing an anonymous bit player offed (*a la* the infamous string of red-shirted lieutenants in *STAR TREK*) is just not the same as seeing your favorite star blown away after only a few minutes screen time.

Some have said that, after making *ED WOOD*, Tim Burton has made an Ed Wood Movie. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ed Wood was trying to play the Hollywood game; he was simply incapable of winning. Burton, on the other hand, has beaten the odds to create something, however uneven, that transcends its flaws. □

BORDERLAND

By Anthony Montesano

"Paranoia will destroy ya."
—The Kinks

Fear and paranoia are the driving forces of *THE CRUCIBLE*, Arthur Miller's feature film adaptation of his classic play about the 17th-century Salem Witch Trials. When Miller wrote his play in the 1950s, he was commenting, rather obviously, on his own generation's "witch trials"—i.e., the McCarthy hearings. While the new version still retains much of the paranoia that fueled the original play and the subsequent 1957 French film version (written by Jean Paul Sartre), its depiction of Fear is, ironically, more in line with a contemporary New Age definition.

The people of Salem tagged their Fear "the Devil." When it comes to Salem, Massachusetts, it is manifested by the town's inner paranoia and indiscretions. An illicit affair between Abigail Williams (Winona Ryder) and her former boss, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis), is the catalyst. When the bitter Abigail participates in a midnight incantation ritual with the town's other teenage girls things get out of hand: she smears blood on her face and calls for the death of Proctor's wife Elizabeth (Joan Allen). The ritual is witnessed by the town preacher and the girls, fearful of their fathers' retaliation, feign possession. This triggers an official church investigation which leads to the arrival of the self-righteous, religiously fervent and intolerant Judge Danforth (Paul Scofield). Soon, Abigail discovers the perfect

After refusing to bear false witness, John Proctor (Daniel Day Lewis) is driven toward the gallows at the conclusion of Miller's *THE CRUCIBLE*.



THE CRUCIBLE

More frightening than any fantasy.



The opening scene reveals there were real witches (or at least would-be witches) in Salem: Winona Ryder tries to place a hex on her rival for John Proctor.

way to seek her revenge on the lover who scorned her and begins to brand the townspeople (including Elizabeth Proctor) as witches.

Scofield is ideal in a role that is the antithesis of his Academy Award-winning turn as Saint Thomas More in *A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS*. In that film, the tide of British public opinion turns against More, who, remaining silent to legally avoid recognizing the divorce of his boss King Henry VIII, is tried and convicted when a former colleague lies to frame him. Here, Scofield spews forth the same injustices in the name of God and country. Blinded by a misleading sense of duty, Danforth vali-

dates Abigail's outrageous accusations and is himself unable to stop the tragic course events once put in motion. The result is innocent person after innocent person sent to the gallows to hang. The film succeeds when it conveys, with a growing momentum, this out-of-control nature of the witch hunt. The only way to escape death is to sign a confession, admitting to possession by the Devil; and the only way to convince the inquisitors that one's confession is "true" is to accuse others as well. Underscoring the persecution of those blacklisted during the McCarthy Era, Miller, of course, has these characters die with honor rather than give in to the establishment.

Director Nicholas Hynter (*THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE*), treats the material with a proper level of respect as the film unflinchingly comments on the proceedings. He depicts Salem as a town doomed by its own design: Puritan rigidity and sexual misconduct. The film also includes the character of Judge Hathorne (Robert Breuler), the distant relative of and inspiration for writer Nathaniel Hawthorne's own Salem Witch trial tale, "Young Goodman Brown."

Far more frightening than any fantasized witch drama, *THE CRUCIBLE* delves deep into the darkness of the human spirit, afraid to confront itself, all too often willing to offer a sacrificial lamb for its own sins. □

Well, at least it doesn't suck...huh-huh, heh-heh!

BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA

12/96. A Paramount release of an MTV production. Director, Mike Judge. Music, John Frizzell. Screenplay by Judge, Joe Stillman, based on MTV's "Beavis and Butt-head," created by Judge. With the voices of Mike Judge, Cloris Leachman, Robert Stack, Eric Bogosian, Richard Linklater.

by Mike Lyons

When it opened in December to monstrous business, some critics reviewed *BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA* as if it was the latest Jane Austen adaptation: "These two malcontent youths, decimating the American landscape, while simultaneously exploring it, are strikingly like a metaphor for the 'Generation X' that they cater to, somehow in search of a voice for their convictions."

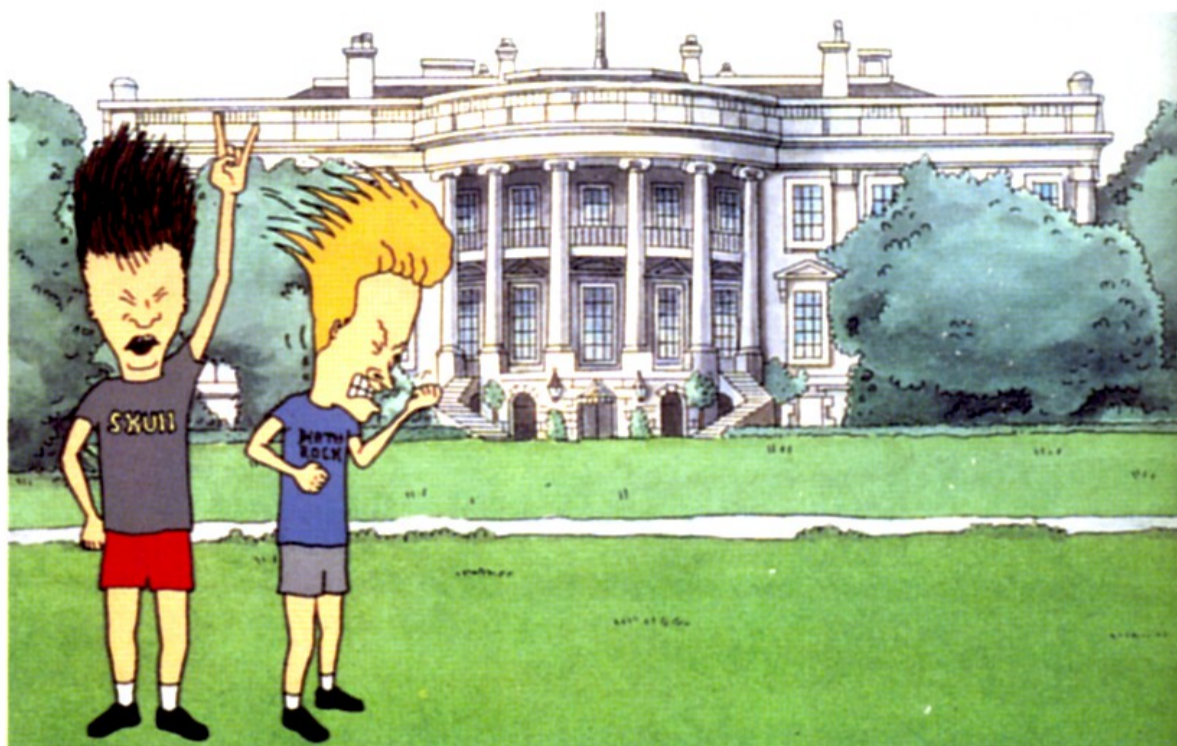
C'mon! This is not *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*; it's *SENSELESS AND EVEN MORE SENSELESSNESS*. However, the film is also a great example that, like such empty-headed comic acts such as Monty Python and

Jim Carrey, you have to be pretty darn smart to seem so dumb.

Creator, co-writer, and director Mike Judge doesn't celebrate the stupidity of B&BH, but instead invites the audience to laugh at just how moronic they can be. Horny Butt-Head falls in love with a stewardess simply because she helped him buckle his seat belt, and we giggle like, well, like Beavis. It can't be helped.

It's Judge's keen sense of comic timing and satire that keeps the film from becoming just another sophomoric comedy (a retro-'70s opening credits montage is a stroke of pop culture genius). Still, at times, the film walks a fine line between bawdy, bathroom humor and just plain old bad taste (a sequence in which B&BH sneak into church confessionals is questionable).

The film's animation, to paraphrase Butt-Head: "It pretty much sucks more than anything's ever sucked before." But, audiences didn't go to see



BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA—comic timing and satire manage to keep the obnoxious duo amusing throughout the feature length-running time.

BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA for a lavish look, and Judge was smart to transfer the show's low-budget feel to the big screen.

The parade of non-credited celebrity voices also keeps one from noticing the film's threadbare quality: Isn't that Bruce Willis and wife Demi Moore as the villains? And gee, the goofy guy the two boys encounter in the desert sounds suspiciously like

David Letterman doing his Butt-Head imitation.

Ultimately, *BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA* is what it is. You can resign yourself to indifference or completely hate it, but you have to somewhat admire a film that, in the prim and proper '90s, has the guts to feature a scene in which a character ignites a campfire with his own flatulence. Lofty heights Jane Austen never rose to. □

What is all the shouting (and screaming) about?

SCREAM

12/96. A Miramax Films release, produced by Cary Woods and Cathy Konrad. Executive producers, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Marianne Madalena. Co-producer, Dixie Capp. Director, Wes Craven. Director of photography, Mark Irwin. Production design, Bruce Allan Miller. Editor, Patrick Lussier. Music, Marco Beltrami. Screenplay by Kevin Williamson.

Sidney Prescott.....	Neve Campbell
Casey Becker.....	Drew Barrymore
Deputy Riley.....	David Arquette
Gale Weathers.....	Courteney Cox
Stuart.....	Matthew Lillard
Billy Loomis.....	Skeet Ulrich
Principal.....	Henry Winkler
Tatum Riley.....	Rose McGowan

by Steve Biodrowski

The slasher genre is so worn out—not to mention outright reviled—that it is hardly difficult to do something a cut above the competition. *SCREAM* certainly is an improvement; but from all the critical and popular success it has received, you have to wonder what all the shouting is about.

Sure, the inside jokes are funny, and the characters, who have actually seen *HALLOWEEN* and its countless imitators, do not seem so relentlessly stupid as their cinematic predecessors. As in past Wes Craven films, the presenta-

tion of teenagers—in terms of casting and costuming—has an everyday believability, avoiding a too-glamorous Hollywood version of party animals. This verisimilitude heightens the suspense, but alas, it is all for naught: the characters may not panic as quickly nor act as stupidly as we've come to expect—they may even fight back with admirable agility (the film sets some kind of record for

physical abuse heaped on its masked killer)—but in the final analysis, they all die with the same formulaic predictability we've come to expect.

Aye, there's the rub. *SCREAM* seeks to hold itself above the common run of slasher flicks by exhibiting a certain sense of self-awareness about its formula, but ultimately the humor cannot disguise the fact that this

film actually is the very thing it seeks to parody—a derivative slasher flick that falls prey to the very same sort of stupid plot devices that plague its sources. For example, when the school principal (Henry Winkler) is gratuitously slaughtered, the majority of the characters abandon a party (to see the body); thus, the film manages to isolate its lead characters for the climax. The story can't recover from this absurdity, nor can the film expect to buy our willing suspension of disbelief by throwing in a few jokes to make us laugh the whole thing off.

Referring back to old movies doesn't make *SCREAM* superior to them, nor does it turn the film into some kind of self-reflexive work of post-modern art. Unlike *WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE*, this film never refers back to itself as a film; instead, Kevin Williamson's script simply seeks to justify its borrowings by acknowledging them with a wink at the audience. As effective as many of its thrills are, this movie is more hypocrisy than homage. □

Neve Campbell and Rose McGowan take a phone call in *SCREAM*.



THE NEXT BIG THING: writer-director-producer Mark Wilkinson on his cyberpunk short.

By Chuck Wagner

If passion defines the artist, how then does one define passion? Perhaps by measure of commitment.

Mark Wilkinson, director-writer-producer of the 16mm science fiction effort *THE NEXT BIG THING* has a lot of commitment. It can be measured by his sacrifice. In debt following the self-financed short subject (\$10,000 to produce, another \$10,000 and growing for p.r. and related costs), he is already planning another short genre film. But how is it to be financed, if his current credit cards are maxed out?

"I just got another credit card in the mail," he said grimly but with a certain eagerness.

Such is the passion of the independent film maker. "It's difficult in making independent films to know when to stop counting the money, because it never stops," said Wilkinson, who directs and designs multimedia material for various clients when he's not making his own films. "We just went to three festivals, and it cost an arm and a leg. And I still don't have a penny because everything I earn goes right out the door."

And that's everything he earns from his day-job! But if he sold the movie, wouldn't he make

Mark Wilkinson wrote, directed and produced *THE NEXT BIG THING*, which he financed with credit cards.



In *THE NEXT BIG THING*, people plug into self-created VR worlds, while their bodies must be maintained by indifferent doctors (Rick Wessler).

some money back? "I guarantee I'll never make anything from this film," Wilkinson firmly stated. It turns out that Troma Pictures (creators of *TOXIC AVENGER* and other masterpieces) is interested in purchasing the film for its *TROMA BASEMENT* segment on cable. However, any revenue Wilkinson receives *must* first be paid out to the SAG actors who deferred their salaries.

So with no chance of remuneration, what does Wilkinson plan to do? Make another film! "Ultimately I would like to have a career directing films, but a big part of that is getting out there, pressing the flesh and getting your name out there far and wide so that a job that's appropriate might appear."

Raised in Boston and a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Wilkinson is another of those who packed his car and headed for Hollywood. When you're an independent film-maker, you have to be clever. Cleverness can make up for lack of capital. "When people found out that *THING* was about virtual reality, everybody was like, 'Oh, you're going to do *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*.' There's no way I'm going to be able to go up against these people who've got a million dollars just for the effects. The only way that we're going to be able to carve a place for ourselves as a film, is if we're clever. If we're clever—and know what kind of movie we are—we can do it. We didn't try to do special effects shots that

would've never worked without a lot of money. There's no way to do it for anything less than a lot of money."

As for trying to make something directly on a computer, he said, "You end up with a video. And it's \$2.50 a frame to get it back up to film. That's \$250 dollars for 3.5 seconds of film."

Wilkinson is not an avid reader of cyberpunk. He arrived at the VR concept for his movie over time. Filmed in New York, the SAG cast was selected from actors who were family friends and acquaintances. Some were the product of casting calls and working with agents.

"Jonathan Staci Kim was a real trouper to lay in that tank for three days straight. He was a hero. The actress who played Angela, the nurse, worked real hard in the role. She went over and trained at the Needle Exchange to get comfortable with needles and to really get to know what it's like at various levels of drug abuse. I had to talk her out of trying heroin or pharmaceutical drugs for the role. That's where acting kicks in."

The actors' work shows the effort. It's good. Wilkinson himself has talent, and his film shows it. He even built sets himself, using material gleaned from dumpsters. "When you're making a film," Wilkinson said modestly, "you gotta have a lot of people on your side."

Let us hope he continues to have people on his side and that he can make larger films. □

THE NEXT BIG THING

Director-writer: Mark Wilkinson. Screened at the Seattle Film Festival, 8/96. 16 mins, unrated. With: Nancy Gianzero, Rick Wessler, Andrew Borba, Jonathan Staci Kim.

A combination of science-fiction and horror (of the moral kind), *THE NEXT BIG THING* portrays a sad future in which young people opt for the absolute tune-out: medically-induced torpor enhanced with virtual reality (VR)—paradise in a perpetual, anesthetic coma. But the film is no overwrought, empty-headed, effects-laden VR melodrama along the lines of *JOHNNY MNEMONIC* or *VIRTUOSITY*. It is a horrific look at the impact such a medical contract has on the "patient" and on those who maintain him. Bobbi Kim (Jonathan Staci Kim) is the patient—a sharp young man who opts to drop out by first creating his own virtual reality world and then having himself placed in a perpetual coma-like state in which that world is fed into his brain and perceived as reality. At first maintained in a sparkling hospital, years later he lies relegated to a dingy, warehouse trough. But in his condition, he is not inclined to complain.

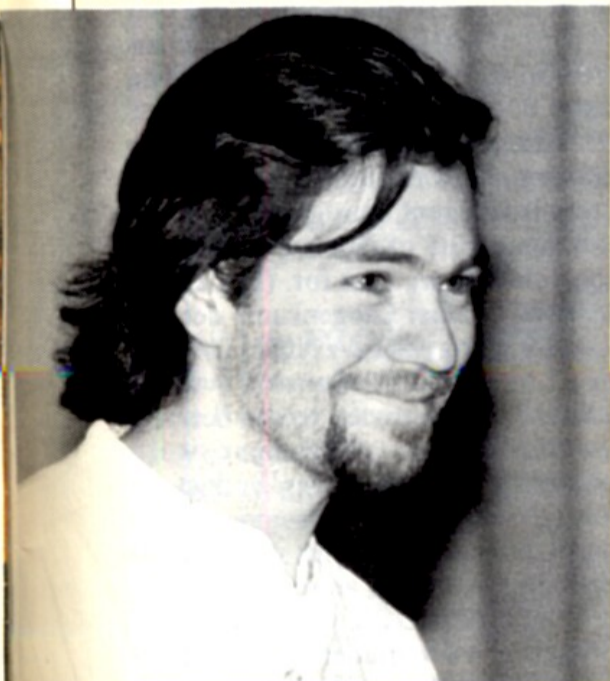
Angela (Nancy Gianzero) is the anesthesiologist who, perhaps trying to numb her revulsion over the condition of her immobile, atrophying patients, is now addicted to the very drugs that she uses in her work. These drugs are her own form of escape, just as Bobbi Kim has VR. Hugh (Andrew Borba) the technician and Darren (Rick Wessler) the doctor live to serve their own schemes and keep the upgrades that Bobbie Kim ordered coming.

There are no explosions or car crashes here. Wilkinson's message (and question) are smaller and more profound: Can any good come of this use of VR technology?

The presentation here is guaranteed to fill viewers with revulsion, and the parallel between Angela and Bobbie makes it clear that Wilkinson considers VR to be the ultimate addiction. Although there may be finer points and shadings that could not be addressed in a short subject, *THE NEXT BIG THING* scores points for the dramatic simplicity of its statement, which is expressed with concise precision.

●● Chuck Wagner & Jay Stevenson

Nancy Gianzero plays the addicted nurse who pockets drugs intended for her helpless patient.



FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

101 DALMATIANS

Director: Stephen Herek. Disney, 11/96. 105 mins. G
With: Glenn Close, Jeff Daniels, Joely Richardson.

This new take on the spotted puppies mystery caper cannily updates the story and injects enough new elements to make it more than just a re-filming of the 1961 original. For the most part, producer-writer John Hughes retains many of the animated film's memorable moments, such as the puppies gawking at TV, the "Twilight Bark," and Cruella roaring around the English countryside in her Coupe de Vil, while shifting much of the story to make the new version something all its own.

Roger Radcliff (Jeff Daniels) is now a designer of computer games rather than a songwriter, and Anita (Joely Richardson) is actually given a career—as a dress designer, working for you-know-who. By making Cruella a tyrannical businesswoman, Hughes and director Stephen Herek create an elaborate new dimension for the villain. Her CEO position gives her an eerie sense of tremendous power.

Some story changes also weigh the film down. The addition of taxidermist Skinner (John Shrapnel) adds nothing beyond an extra bit of creepiness, and the last third of the film degenerates into repetitious, low-grade HOME ALONE slapstick, including electrocution, fires, pratfalls, and molasses.

Fortunately, this is overwhelmed by the numerous cute shots of the puppies, who are the true marvels of the film. Kudos to animal trainer Gary Gero, who (with some help from CGI) pulls off numerous, hilarious sight gags. Bringing one of animations greatest villains to life, Close seemingly revels in the fun she's having. Her skills and professionalism are evident in every one of her scenes, as she hits all the right notes in a role that could have easily been over the top.

101 DALMATIANS is great to look at, and like SPACE JAM, it is, in a sense, a blend of live-action and cartoon. Like that Warner Bros opus, Disney's film is essentially a product, albeit a well-made and entertaining one. ●●● Mike Lyons

Some wonderfully cute animal action cannot redeem this cynical piece of marketing manipulation, which takes one of Disney lesser efforts and expands it to tedious length without ever really justifying the transition to live-action. The loose story (also a weak point in the original) takes forever to get to a protracted climax that likewise goes on far too long without building to any real hilarity: i.e., instead of one comeuppance, Cruella



Glenn Close sinks her teeth into the role of Cruella de Vil in 101 DALMATIANS.

gets three or four, but the subsequent ones never top the first, so it's just a matter of repetition, not the sort of accumulating chaos (*a la* Laurel and Hardy) for which the filmmakers are obviously aiming. Close gives the sort of portrayal made to be overrated—a shrill, one-note performance more suited to a drag queen than an actress. Daniels and Richardson lend nicely understated support, but the real stars are the animals—not only the charming pups, but also a hilarious barnyard menagerie, including some Jim Henson creatures that are life-like in appearance but amusingly anthropomorphized in action. ● Jay Stevenson

STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT

Director: Jonathan Frakes. Paramount, 11/96. 112 mins. PG-13. With: Alice Krige, Patrick Stewart, Brent Spiner, Alfre Woodard.

For fans who believe the even-numbered TREKS are the only ones worth watching, STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT does not disappoint, delivering a first-rate adventure. Unlike the rushed and unfocused GENERATIONS, the eighth installment boasts a strong story and supporting cast, particularly Alice Krige as the Borg Queen. Extending the beehive metaphor, the Borg become drones to Krige's Queen, who ironically tries to assimilate Data (Brent Spiner) by tempting him in his search for humanity with human skin grafts. While some might resist the idea of personifying the Borg through the Queen, Krige's lusty performance, coupled with the Queen's asexual cyborg body, provides the Borg's alien collectiveness with an alluring yet technologically sterile decadence that gives assimilation a chilling seductiveness.

Equally effective is the return of the Moby Dick motif, last seen in Khan's Ahab-like quest for vengeance against Captain Kirk in STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN. Here, Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) is the erstwhile Ahab, seeking to destroy the

Borg with a blinding, obsessive zeal. Picard is saved by Lily (Alfre Woodard), who helps him recognize his self-destructive behavior. Stewart turns in another excellent performance, capturing both the internal demons with which Picard struggles (the result of his assimilation by the Borg years earlier) and the tender relationship he develops with the confused and frightened Lily.

While the film's revisionist take on the original series' Zephram Cochrane is irksome, actor James Cromwell still shines as a man forced to live up to the 24th-century's own revisionist idealism. His bawdy, drunk Cochrane is not the visionary the *Enterprise* crew believe him to be, and he's at his best when he deflates their hero worship and sometimes too syrupy world views. In addition, director Jonathan Frakes (Commander Riker) makes the transition from small- to big-screen TREKS with ease, imbuing the film with an honesty and tautness that GENERATIONS lacked. Frakes' comfort with the STAR TREK universe shines through, and if producer Rick Berman can sign him for the ninth installment and provide him with a story that stretches beyond the franchise's traditional TV roots, the series finally might break the even-odd-numbered curse yet. ●●●● Matthew F. Saunders

THREE LIVES AND ONLY ONE DEATH

Director-writer: Raul Ruiz. Screened at the Nuart Theatre in Los Angeles, 11/96, unrated. With: Marcello Mastroianni, Marisa Paredes, Anna Galiena.

This anthology film, with hints of the fantastic, puts a new spin on the form. One of the questions of any anthology is: what is the link between the separate stories? Sometimes there is a linking device (as in the Amicus films of the 1970s), or sometimes the connection is merely a matter of casting or thematic similarity.

Raul Ruiz's film, at first, appears to take the casting route. In his last screen

role, the late Marcello Mastroianni (who had done this kind of thing before in YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW) plays four different characters. In the first story, he plays a long-lost husband who claims to have been living across the street from his wife in an apartment where fairies have kept him trapped by distorting time. Subsequently, he appears as an anthropology professor who drops out, as a mute butler, and finally as a business man who has invented a fictional family to explain his frequent absences from work—only to be surprised when he receives news that his "family" is coming to visit!

As the stories progress, characters from previous episodes reappear, suggesting that we are dealing with some kind of overlapping levels of reality. Eventually the film abandons this metaphysical tease and instead opts for something (relatively) more mundane: Mastroianni is a garden variety case of multiple personality, living out several separate lives. In effect, the film turns out not to be an anthology after all. The individual episodes are entertaining, and the mystery of how they will blend together is intriguing, but this revelation is a bit disappointing, even frustrating, considering the quality of the film up to that point.

●● Steve Biodrowski

TELEVISION

TRILOGY OF TERROR II

Director: Dan Curtis. U.S.A., 10/96. 120 mins. unrated. With: Lysette Anthony, Geraird Wyn-Davies.

Dan Curtis, who appears to be reviving his career by remaking everything he's ever done in the past (please spare us retreads of THE WINDS OF WAR and WAR AND REMEMBRANCE!), has apparently forgotten most of what made the original TRILOGY OF TERROR frightening. Lysette Anthony, whose English accent fades in and out, gives her all, but she is never allowed to reprise the evil-vamp image that made her so appealing in DARK SHADOWS. She's put into typical horror scenarios that require little more from her than crying and screaming, which is a waste of her talents. Meanwhile, the episode scripts are so mediocre and predictable that it's hard to feel any sympathy for characters so dense that they never catch on to the danger until it's far too late. Let's face it: horror fans enjoying watching dimwits die; it's for the characters intelligent enough to mount at least some kind of defense against the monsters that we root for. (For example, once Heather Langenkamp decides to start kicking ass in A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, she wins over the audience, and we want to see her best pus-faced Freddy.) With lame, well-worn plots and shoestring-budget effects (although there does appear to be a split-second CGI shot of the Zuni fetish doll skittering across the museum floor), TRILOGY OF TERROR II only serves as a reminder of how superior the first TRILOGY was 20 years ago. ● Dan Cziraky

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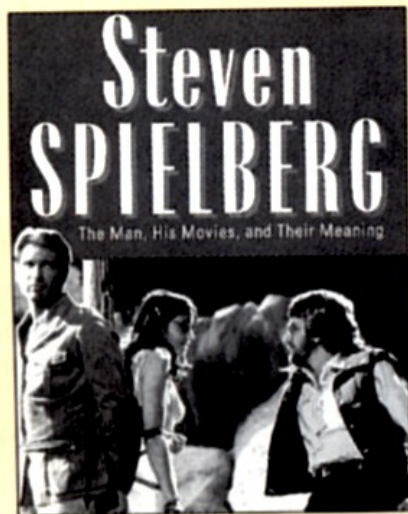
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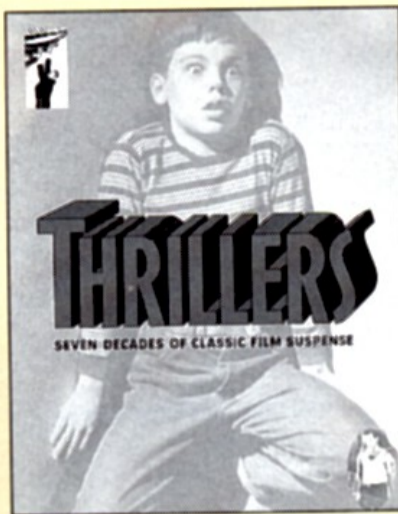
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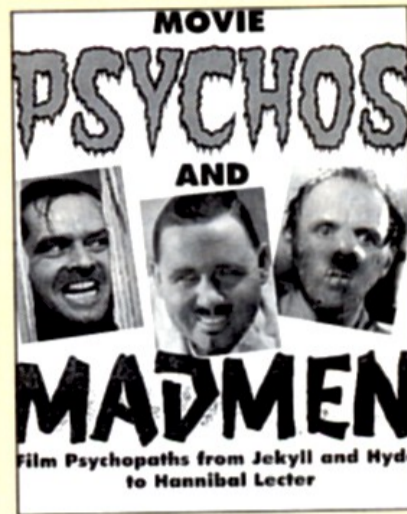
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GENRE OSCAR WINNERS

continued from page 44

as strictly "popcorn fare" rather than "a serious artistic achievement." In recent years, however, the Academy seems to be "lightening up." The Best Picture nominations of such recent genre hits as GHOST (1990), 1991's SILENCE OF THE LAMBS and BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (a first for an animated feature), and BABE (1995), reveals that the Academy is recognizing films for their aesthetic values and not just their box-office muscle.

With all parameters of film expanding, seemingly with each passing day, this and future Academy Awards will be interesting to watch. Let's hope, when called for, Oscar will look past the usual drama and epic and delve into *cinefantastique*.

BEST & WORST DTV

continued from page 52

wipe the tape clean of the film, and then cleanse themselves. You'll want to do both after watching this trash.

BEST MAJOR DTV

The initial major studio DTV productions were consistent only in their mediocrity. However, while still in its infancy, major studio DTV is starting to show signs

of promise with the first praiseworthy live-action DTV release from a major studio: TREMORS 2: AFTERSHOCKS.

The key elements for success here is the involvement of some of the creative team from the entertaining original. Director Ron Underwood, writers Brent Maddock and S.S. Wilson are back in varying capacities, with Wilson handling the directing. Returning stars Fred Ward and Michael Gross help the creative team recreate the original's likable mix of thrills and laughs. The most satisfactory element here is that instead of just remaking the first film, as so many sequels do, the familiar elements of the first film are juggled around to make it all new again.

Fans of the original should find much to smile about here and, while it might have managed a decent theatrical run, this is a welcome DTV entry that is clearly one of the best to date.

WORST MAJOR DTV

There probably wasn't much hope from the start that THEODORE REX, a tale of mis-matched cops (one human, one dinosaur!) would be any good, but director Jonathan Betuel (of the similarly lame MY SCIENCE PROJECT) doesn't have a clue how to even make it bearable.

There isn't much I can say that hasn't already been said elsewhere about this 35-million dollar DTV (the most expensive to date) disaster. Star Whoopi Goldberg tried to get out of making it, saying she "could smell it coming." The odor hadn't improved by the time it hit the video store fan.

BEST OUTLAW MOVIE

The ever-growing cadre of amateur and semi-pro moviemakers has become a bona fide phenomenon in the past few years. '96 has seen huge advances in the movement with more than a few getting their movies into video stores, including the Blockbuster chain.

ADDICTED TO MURDER exhibits a debt to HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER in its tale of the New York Mangler, but Kevin Lindemuth adds a supernatural element that finds Joel, the killer, in a symbiotic relationship with a beautiful vampire. He provides a reminder of human life, and a ready supply of blood, while she provides the perfect victim for his homicidal urges—one that can't really die.

Lindemuth uses a fractured narrative that hops helter-skelter over a thirty-year period and employs many flashbacks and flash forwards that are deliberately disorienting, if often irritating as well.

He takes a NATURAL BORN KILLERS approach to the film's visuals, using a variety of formats and frequent verite techniques. Some of it is needlessly showy, and the overall film is much too long (better as a short I suspect) but much of it is undeniably effective. On a minuscule budget Lindenmuth has created a bizarre vampire film that, albeit far from wholly successful, is no less amazing considering the director's resources and experience.

WORST OUTLAW

INVASION FOR FLESH AND BLOOD is a no-budget epic whose plot exists only in the realm of "fever dream" illogic. Suffice it to say that there is lots of blood, gore, some flashes of nudity and enough bad acting for a Steven Seagal film festival. There are also lots of monsters and often impressive homegrown effects, but it's all thrown out with such reckless abandon that there is no hope of a cohesive narrative. There is nothing wrong with ambition, but the one lesson most of the "Outlaws" need to learn is the one that "Outlaw Godfather" J.R. Bookwalter exhibited in last year's SANDMAN and more recently in POLY-MORPH. Don't let your reach exceed your grasp.

LOST HIGHWAY

October Films presents a CIBY2000 production. Directed by David Lynch. Produced by Deepak Nayar, Tom Sternberg, Mary Sweeney. Director of photography, Peter Deming. Editor, Mary Sweeney. Music composer and conductor, Angelo Badalamenti. Additional music by Barry Adamson. Unit production manager, Deepak Nayar. First assistant director, Scott Cameron. Second assistant director, Simone Farmer. Production designer/Costume designer, Patricia Norris. Production supervisor, Sabrina S. Sutherland. Set decorator, Leslie Morales. Costumes, Maurizio Bizzari. Camera operator, Paul Hughen. Sound design, David Lynch. Supervising sound editor, Frank Gaeta. Music editor, Marc Vanocur. Additional sound effects supplied by Ann Kroeber-Splet. Screenplay by David Lynch and Barry Gifford. 1/97, 135 mins, R.

Fred Madison.....Bill Pullman
 Renee Madison/Renee.....Patricia Arquette
 Al.....John Roselius
 Andy.....Michael Massee
 Mystery Man.....Robert Blake
 Pete Dayton.....Balthazar Getty
 Bill Dayton.....Gary Busey
 Arnie.....Richard Pryor
 Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent.....Robert Loggia
 Phil.....Jack Nance
 Ed.....Lou Eppolito
 Party Girl.....Jenna Maetliand



"Lynch has a realistic character like Robert Loggia beat a guy up for following too close," said Blake. "Where did that come from, and where did it go to?"

by Steve Biodrowski

David Lynch has been America's premier Dark Dreamer for so long that the mantle has become perhaps too familiar. His excursions into the bizarre, at least for awhile, were so identifiable that they were starting to resemble self-parody. His television show *TWIN PEAKS* did a good job of working this fact to its advantage: coming off the critical success of *BLUE VELVET*, Lynch (with an assist from collaborator Mark Frost) managed to play around with audience expectation and delivered an excellent combination of the absurdly funny and the strangely weird. Meanwhile, in his feature film work, the dark, subversive humor of *BLUE VELVET*, which contrasted nicely with the film's more disturbing elements, gave way to what was almost outright camp in *WILD AT HEART*. By the time of *TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME*, he seemed to be tired of purveying black comedy. Instead, he chose to rub his audience's noses in the darker aspects of the show; unfortunately, the audience, attuned to expect dark comic relief amidst the horror, turned away.

So, what is there left for Lynch to do, after his brief moment of mass market popularity has faded? Well, quite simply, he has chosen to follow his own muse. There is nothing about *LOST HIGHWAY* that smacks of commercial calculation or audience consideration. Instead, he has dreamed a brilliant new film that forges his signature elements, film noir stylings, and hard-boiled plot motifs. Working from a basic premise ("What if I had a second chance?"), he and Barry Gifford spin out a surreal tale that, while puzzling, follows its own dream logic to a satisfying conclusion. While the obscure elements limit easy audience identification with the characters (especially when they change identities), Lynch's mastery of the craft, both visual and audio, pulls viewers along in its grip. Barry Gifford's explanation of the transformation as a "psycho-genic fugue" is useful for those puzzling out the film after seeing it, but is not necessary to enjoy the actual experience of screening it. Those looking for a film that is challenging, different, and unusual will find much to appreciate. □

ROBERT BLAKE

continued from page 35

was he going to have people react? Normally, when you see somebody who looks that way, you say, 'God, you look weird, man! What the fuck is your story?' I thought, 'What is David going to do when I walk into this party scene?' And it's very interesting, because he told everybody, 'React to him like he's a butler.' He made all of them behave as though I looked normal. That was just a choice he made at the spur of the moment. I didn't have Bill Pullman go, 'Hey, you look crazy!' He just turned around and said, 'Hi, how are ya?' David didn't have anybody refer to the way I looked throughout the whole movie. No one was surprised or repulsed. He just said, 'That's what I'm going to do with this character: have everybody deal with him like he looks normal.' And I never asked him why he did that, but I probably wouldn't have if I was directing. I would have had people 'behave' around that makeup, but he didn't do that."

Of the final result, Blake said, "I saw the film, and I liked it the way I like Ingmar Bergman, but I didn't understand it. What you enjoy is the experience of seeing it. I remember when I was a young man, we always used to go to Bergman films, *WILD STRAWBERRIES* and all these strange films. Everybody would come out, sit there till three o'clock in the morning, smoking dope and discussing the movies. I would, too, except I knew I was full of shit!"—he laughs—"Well, I really think that when Max Von Sydow was doing this, he was really doing that.' It was bullshit. It's the same with David. I don't understand it; you just have to groove with it. He takes a realistic character like Robert Loggia's character and all of a sudden he stops a guy on the highway and beats the shit out of him for following him too close.

Where the fuck did that come from, and where did it go to? You just have to roll with it. Like I said, if I was looking at Hieronymus Bosch and finding one corner of the painting and saying, 'Well, if there's a squirrel over there fucking a cockroach, I wonder what that means?'

Although working with Lynch was different for Blake, he wouldn't mind repeating the experience. "I would like to work with him sometime where I have a chance to act," he said. "When you're doing something so obtuse like that and so stylized, I think, personally, the best thing is not to go with it: you let the makeup, wardrobe, character, and the dialogue speak for themselves, and as an actor, your job is almost to be the narrator. Like, in the first scene, walking to Bill Pullman: the whole situation is so macabre and so menacing that the thing to do as an actor is to leave it alone. If you start going with it, then it's going to go over the fucking top; it's going to become a joke to the audience. So you don't get to do much acting. If I came in to play a scene like 'Hey, you fucked my girlfriend, so I'm going to kill you,' I get to act that. But if I come in dressed in this Kabuki outfit and all this shit, then the best thing for me to do is nothing. I could have made a big deal out of taking the gun out of Pullman's hand and pointing it at Loggia and killing him, but everything else was cooking, so the less you do, the better it's going to be. Otherwise, it'll be all over the fuckin' place. When I came in to see Pullman, I could have had a whole lot of weird, strange shit going on, but then it would be all fucked up."

Blake explains this approach by pointing to his early apprenticeship. "I was trained by very good actors," he stated. "I was on the set when I was five years old with Spencer Tracy. A lot of what I learned growing up in terms of artistry is very clean, very tidy,

very organized. If you look at the great films of Warner Bros or Metro, you don't see anything like you would see in a film like *CASINO*: there's nothing loose; the dialogue is clean; you get through talking, and then I talk and look at you. What I was trained on, by Gable and all those people, was a tremendous amount of economy, simplicity. It was all like a Picasso painting. When I did *TREASURE OF SIERRA MADRE* and I watched Bogart work, even though he had scenes where he absolutely went insane, you didn't see him—what we call—chewing up the scenery. He wasn't banging off of walls and doing all this stuff; he was very clean and very specific. I like those kind of actors. I think Anthony Hopkins has become that. The more he works, the less he does. By the time he did *Hannibal Lecter*, he was doing very little. He just *looked*—very clean, very economical. He wasn't all over the fucking place. He wasn't climbing the walls, wandering around. He didn't use his arms or hands. He didn't use any outrageous makeup. He was just clean, tidy, and fucking brilliant. Don't give it to the audience; leave it to the audience. Which is what I was doing with the Mystery Man. Less is more, until finally I was doing nothing except putting the words out." □

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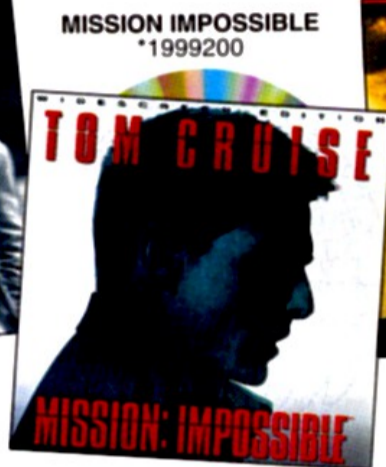
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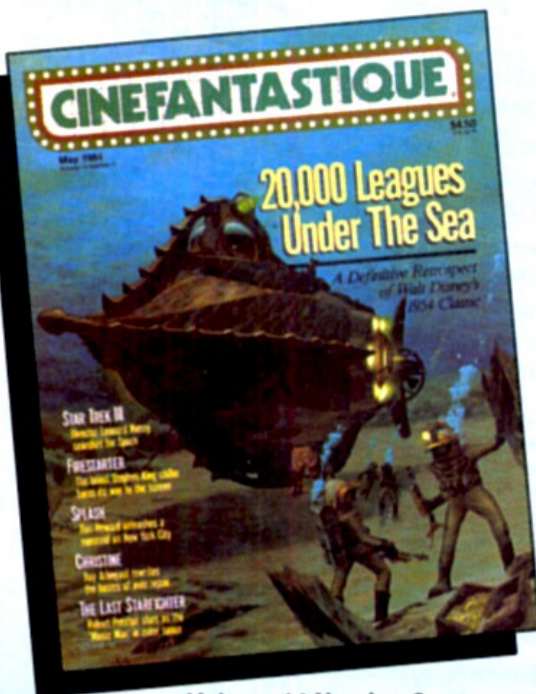
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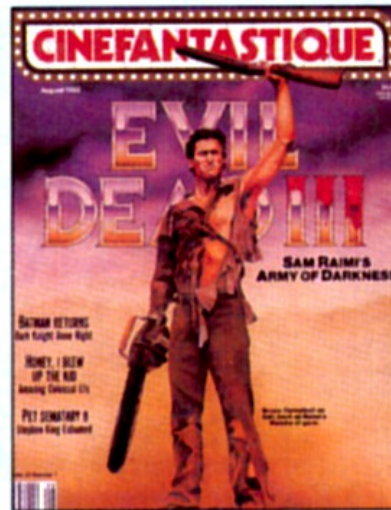
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